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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on nine research projects conducted by 12 adult literacy practitioners with Literacy South in North Carolina in 1993. The focus of the project was to engage literacy practitioners in self-directed research that generated staff training and development. This report is a chronological account of the research projects with a commentary attached, in seven chapters. The seven chapters are based upon the stages of a research process: deciding who would be involved in the research at the site; choosing a topic for the research and formulating a research question; deciding how the research would be conducted; collecting the data; analyzing the data; writing a report; and reporting and reflecting on the findings. A detailed account of what happened forms the core of each chapter, with quotations from field notes, recordings made at the time, and other documents where available. Key events and incidents are highlighted. A commentary accompanies each account, based on field notes, research documents, interviews, and transcripts. The activity at both project sites is reported separately in each chapter. Reflections on the work, issues arising, and outcomes are contained in two chapters in the final section of the report. Recommendations from the project include the following: research should include time reflecting with practitioners about their key issues; reference tools should be provided; participants should be asked to formulate plans and make commitments to the research; participants should keep portfolios to document their work; and regular group meetings should held. Four appendixes contain practitioner research outcomes at the two sites, a project reading list, and a list of projects that were tape recorded. (KC)

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ED 372 301

Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development

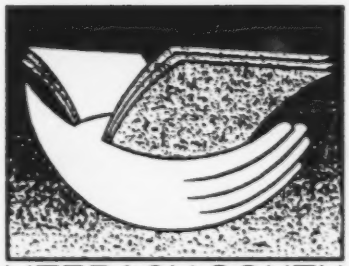
The Story of a Practitioner Research Project

Andrew Pates

Hanna A. Fingeret

Final Project Report Prepared for the

National Institute for Literacy



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Innovative Training Practices:
Practitioner Research as Staff Development

The Story of a Practitioner Research Project

Andrew Pates

Hanna A. Fingeret

Literacy South
Durham, NC

Final Project Report Prepared for the

National Institute for Literacy

February, 1994

Acknowledgments

A large number of people have made this Project possible and have enabled it to happen. We should like to thank them all. In particular:

• We could not have conducted the Project without the active and willing participation of staff at Alamance Community College, Burlington NC, and Piedmont Peace Project, Kannapolis, NC. We hope that the Project has justified itself to them for the time and effort involved. In any case, we would like to thank them all for their friendship, tolerance and perseverance.

• Susan Lytle at the University of Pennsylvania has been a continuous reference point for us in our struggles to understand the full implications of practitioner research in adult literacy. We should like to thank her for generously sharing her experience with us.

• Cassie Drennon and Suzanne Cockley have been pioneering the application of practitioner research in Virginia and we should like to thank them for sharing their experience with us.

• The staff at Literacy South have all been involved in the Project. Page McCullough, Jereann King and Jonathan Estes all contributed their knowledge, insights and technical support. Pearl Shelby helped to hold the Project together and enabled us to keep our feet on the ground. Jaleh Estes transcribed our tapes, as always, quickly and accurately. In many ways, this Project drew on many pieces of Literacy South's experience: everybody's work and insight contributed to its formulation and completion.

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SECTION I: BACKGROUND

This Section contains two chapters which explain the background to the Project and outline some issues that affected the way it was conducted.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of nine pieces of research conducted by twelve adult literacy practitioners in North Carolina during 1993. The practitioners worked at two sites, a community college in Burlington and a community organization in Kannapolis, both of which are mill towns located in the North Carolina Piedmont. The project was instigated by Literacy South, a non-profit organization located in Durham, NC, which was already working on staff and curriculum development with these organizations. Staff from Literacy South provided support for the practitioners and documented the Project as it took place.

This account provides a description of the activities and process in the Project and presents some insights into how it worked. It provides pointers to issues that typically occur in practitioner research and it is intended to provide support for others working in adult literacy who want to engage in similar activities. For those who are interested in the theoretical and philosophical framework for practitioner research in adult literacy, Chapter 11 places this present work in relation to other work done in the field.

Project Focus

The Project was funded by the National Institute for Literacy, for the year November 1992 to October 1993. Its purpose was outlined in the Project proposal **"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development,"** submitted to the National Institute for Literacy in July, 1992. The title encapsulated two distinct ideas:

- That the project would involve literacy practitioners engaging in their own research; and
- That the purpose of engaging in this work was to generate staff training and development outcomes.

A third intention was also outlined in the proposal. It was planned that the research would focus on evaluation, and that it would identify some outcomes of the work that Literacy South had been conducting with the two sites.

Practitioner Research

The term "practitioner" is used to denote anyone working in adult literacy; it includes not just teachers but coordinators and administrators, volunteer tutors and recruiters.

The term "practitioner research" is used to describe research activity conducted by practitioners: that is, they identify a problem or issue for study, arising out of their own experience or concerns; they decide how to conduct the research; and they decide what the appropriate outcomes for the work should be, within the constraints or demands of their working context. Therefore, it contrasts with "academic research" which is driven by the concerns, methods and intended outcomes of the university and of academic disciplines.

The idea that practitioners might engage in research or inquiry into their own work is not new. Practitioner research has been current among public school teachers in the United States and among professionals working in human service agencies in Britain for some years. It is, however, a comparatively recent development for practitioner research to be used with adult literacy practitioners in the United States. It is congruent with the idea of participatory literacy education, a philosophy and practice in which the work of Literacy South is grounded, and which provides a framework for an increasing number of people working in adult literacy.

Practitioner research starts from the same premises as other participatory learning -- namely, that for effective learning to take place, the person engaging in learning must be involved in identifying the needs, methods and outcomes for that learning. The main difference is that in this case, the learner is the practitioner rather than the adult literacy student. The underlying principles are, however, the same.

This brief account has incorporated the idea that research is a learning process. It is probably a commonplace idea that research is conducted in order to generate knowledge, to assist in our learning about our world. The view of research as a learning process adds however, an additional dimension, namely that the process of engaging in research can itself be a learning

experience. This matches the knowledge that adult literacy students who actively engage in the process of managing their learning become more effective learners as well as more proficient in their uses of their literacy skills. This suggests that any research project automatically has the potential for two types of outcome: formal learning about the topic being selected for study; and incidental learning about a variety of issues, which will vary according to the person conducting the work, their prior experience and how they conduct the work.

Staff Development

The idea of research as a learning process connects to the second idea in the title of the research proposal: that practitioner research can be a form of staff development.

Most staff training and development starts from the premise that training consists of sharing and imparting skills, knowledge and behaviors that the practitioner needs to know and adopt. The agenda for staff development often is identified by the work organization or by more remote academic or governmental agencies. Practitioner research as a staff development mechanism, however, starts from an assumption that practitioners are both engaged in and concerned about their work, and that they are able to identify issues that are truly grounded in the complexities of working with adult literacy students. It continues with a second assumption that education professionals are competent learners and have the capacity to ask questions and arrive at reasonable and realistic answers. It also implies that these answers and the conclusions to which they lead will be accessible and real for the practitioners involved.

Herein lies a paradox, however. It is possible and likely that practitioners will select topics for study that seem important for themselves, or for the continued development of their teaching. These topics may differ from those identified by others as areas where practitioners need to develop their skills and knowledge, or from topics that address issues identified as important by the work organization. Moreover, since much of the incidental learning is fortuitous, not consciously planned or identified at the beginning of the research process, the incidental learning is even less predictable at the outset.

Indeed, it may not emerge at all unless there is a process established to allow it to take place, and unless the practitioner engages in serious struggle with the work.

If, then, the project is genuinely set up as a process in which practitioners address their own concerns, it is possible that staff development outcomes will not happen, or will not happen in terms wanted by the employer or work organization.

A major purpose of this Project was, therefore, to see if it is possible to identify what types of learning (and by extension staff development) take place during practitioner research, and where and how this happens. And a basic premise in designing the Project was that allowing the practitioners the freedom to plan and execute the work that they wanted to do, in ways that they could handle, was more important than trying to engineer particular outcomes.

Therefore, the staff development process was a hands-off process, and the account that follows concentrates primarily on the research activities, or the practitioners' formal learning. The incidental learning achieved, or the wider staff development impact, is discussed in Chapter 10, in the *Reflections* section of the report.

Evaluation

The connection between purpose and process features again when we look at the intended evaluation outcomes for the research. The Project was intended to furnish evaluation data for the curriculum and staff development work that Literacy South was conducting with the two research sites. However, the issue of ownership and control of the research - whether it should be totally owned by the practitioners or whether it should first serve needs defined by other people - was fundamental to the way the Project was conducted. We selected a model in which the practitioners were not asked to take on anyone else's questions or work. This approach, viewing practitioner research as something owned primarily by the practitioner, informed the way we worked and was influential in determining the direction to be taken. As a

result, we left the practitioners to formulate their own research, hoping that the outcomes would contribute to evaluation.

A number of evaluation outcomes were in fact achieved both through the formal and the incidental learning outcomes. These are reviewed in Chapter 11. In that Chapter, we argue that most of the work conducted contributed to an evaluation, though not necessarily covering all the evaluation outcomes possible. Further, since the Literacy South staff had a high degree of interaction with the practitioners, including interviews to determine how the Project was working, additional data about the practitioners' work, including pieces that reflected outcomes from previous work with Literacy South, was generated.

Nature of the Report

Perspective

Since the practitioners involved were encouraged to select their own routes, their work and its flow is taken as the framework for the story. It is, in the first instance, an account of their work. However, the account is written by the Literacy South project staff, not by the practitioners themselves, and is, therefore, also an account of our experience.

There were two sets of players: the practitioners conducting the research and the Literacy South team that instigated and supported the work. Each set of players has a perspective on what took place. The Report is written as an account by Literacy South of the work conducted by practitioners at Alamance Community College and Piedmont Peace Project. It attempts to provide an account of what was taking place from both points of view: the account of the work from Literacy South staff is based on our records, notes and observations; the account from the practitioners is based on an analysis of tape recordings made while the work was in process and on taped interviews conducted with participants at the beginning and end of the project.

The participants have been invited to comment on the draft document, to validate the accuracy of the account.

Organization of the Report

The core of the Report is a chronological account of the research projects with a commentary attached, in seven chapters in Section II, *An Account of the Research*.

A detailed account of what happened forms the core of each chapter, with quotations from field notes, recordings made at the time, and other documents where available. Key events and incidents are highlighted.

A commentary accompanies each account. These comments are based on field notes, research documents, interviews and transcripts, and include comments and perspectives from as wide a range of participants as possible. If there was inadequate data for a commentary in any section, we have solicited extra comments. The source of the data is indicated with the text.

The activity at both sites is reported separately, but is contained in each chapter. This allows the process to be seen in two different contexts, side by side, even though they may have been taking place at different times.

Reflections on the work, issues arising and outcomes are contained in two chapters in Section III, *Reflections*, and includes the theoretical context of the work, references to the literature about practitioner research in adult literacy, and our evaluation of the Project.

Sequencing the Chapters

The seven chapters in Section II are based upon the stages of a research process, namely:

- deciding who would be involved in the research at the site;
- choosing a topic for the research and formulating a research question;
- deciding how the research would be conducted;
- collecting the data;
- analyzing the data;
- writing a report;
- reporting and reflecting on the findings.

Research does not always follow this sequence of steps, in this order. However, the sequence was offered to the project participants as a simple way of understanding the processes and stages they could expect to go through in conducting their research. It was also used as a way of framing the expectations of the project staff and of linking these expectations to the time available; since time is always an issue in projects like this, it became a useful project management tool.

Project Personnel

There were three sets of people involved in the work: the staff of Literacy South, the practitioners from Alamance Community College and the practitioners from Piedmont Peace Project. The practitioners are described in Chapter 3, *Getting Started*.

Three members of the Literacy South staff were directly involved in the Project:

Hanna Fingeret, Executive Director of Literacy South, was the Project Director. She wrote the original proposal, oversaw the execution of the Project and took part in some of the major activities when all the project participants came together.

Andy Pates, Research Associate and project consultant at Literacy South was the Project Manager. He negotiated setting up the Project at each site, ensured that the Project was happening and provided support and technical advice to the practitioners. He was also responsible for documenting the process and drafting the final report.

Pearl Shelby, Financial Manager at Literacy South, also was the Project Research Assistant. In this capacity, she worked with Andy to ensure that the projects were taking place and she interviewed the participants at the beginning and end of the Project. She also recorded many of the sessions, managed the transcribing, and monitored the budget.

Other members of the Literacy South staff have been engaged at the two project sites in ongoing curriculum development technical assistance,

especially Jereann King, Director of Programs, and Jonathan Estes, Assistant Director of Publications.

A Note on Research Methods

Since the Literacy South staff were documenting the story of this Project and the processes involved, we were also engaging in a piece of research. The outcome of that work is this Report.

Several methods were employed to generate data: some were pre-planned and some just happened.

- The Project Manager (Andy Pates) maintained a research journal in which to record events, interactions and observations. This provided a contextual framework for the subsequent work of piecing together what had happened.
- The Project Research Assistant (Pearl Shelby) conducted interviews with the participants early in the project and near the end, to obtain their views of the work and its outcomes and impact.
- Pearl tape recorded interviews, meetings, and other work sessions. On a few occasions, the tape recorder did not work - only one such malfunction occurred during a critical meeting; notes on that meeting were reconstructed afterwards.
- Many (but not all) of the tapes were subsequently transcribed by Jaleh Estes. Transcribers are the unsung heroes of qualitative research and deserve special thanks.
- The project team (Hanna, Andy and Pearl) met regularly to review the work, in what became termed "update meetings." These meetings dealt with administrative issues and problems, and acted as reflection sessions on the work. Most of these meetings were recorded.
- The Literacy South staff also met periodically to share information and to reflect on the work, in the context of the wider work Literacy South had been conducting with these sites, and to think about the implications of practitioner research for Literacy South's work, generally. Many of these meetings were recorded.
- Additional evidence became available from participants' written reports, and from discussions of the work that took place as part of the process.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development". Proposal submitted by Literacy South to the National Institute for Literacy, July 1992.

CHAPTER 2

GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

Timeline: July, 1992 to October, 1992

The Project Proposal

The Project started with a proposal to the National Institute for Literacy, from Literacy South, at the end of July, 1992. The Project was accepted by the Institute at the end of September, 1992, and began at the beginning of November, 1992.

The Project was framed as staff development:

> "Literacy South seeks support to improve the training and technical assistance provided to professional and volunteer literacy practitioners by developing an inquiry-based approach to staff development and training in collaboration with teams from two literacy programs in the southeastern United States. The knowledge gained from this project will help the National Institute for Literacy and other literacy organizations learn how to provide more effective assistance to programs and teachers who want to improve their practice." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

This model of staff development "is rooted in teachers' questions and problems in their practice as well as their critical reading and interactions.... It is an ongoing process that involves the entire program staff and students in various roles, rather than a series of episodic, one-shot workshops offered by experts."

Practitioner research was described as "a process through which literacy workers investigate questions that are important to them in their practice," based on a number of important assumptions:

> "1) that practitioners ask important questions;
>
> 2) that investigation of practitioners' questions will yield useful insights that can improve their practice and can help others;
>
> 3) that practitioners are capable of engaging in research when it is structured into their jobs and they receive appropriate assistance;
>
> 4) that practitioners' research projects will have a high probability of usefulness for themselves and others because the questions addressed by these projects are generated by practice;

5) that it is desirable to develop a capacity for practitioner research within literacy programs because it contributes to the development of more effective practitioners who are reflective and critical of their practice, and are continuing learners about their work. As such, practitioner research projects complement other program improvement, staff development and training efforts." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

This method involves "a process of reflection and investigation (through which) they:

- learn to respect the knowledge and experience they have gained from practice, and to respect the importance of their questions as practitioners,
- identify their questions,
- develop a strategy for systematic investigation,
- implement their project,
- analyze their results,
- reflect on the extent to which they have developed insight into their original question and how their questions have changed,
- develop conclusions to share with others,
- develop and implement recommendations for their own practice,
- and then create new questions for the process to continue." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

Literacy South's interest in the use of practitioner research reflects a belief that it models an approach to staff development that is congruent with a good participatory approach to literacy education. Practitioner research uses the learner's concerns as the subject matter; builds on the learner's experience, skills and knowledge; and works towards learner-defined outcomes. This Project built on two major projects previously conducted by Literacy South.

Choosing the Project Sites

The project sites selected were literacy programs with which Literacy South was already working:

"We propose working with two programs: the Piedmont Peace Project in Kannapolis, NC and Alamance Community College in Burlington, NC. The Piedmont Peace Project is a community organization that is integrating literacy into its services. Alamance Community College provides Adult Basic Education services to a multi-county area in central North Carolina. Both of these

> programs are working with Literacy South to develop a more learner centered approach to instruction. They are developing model learner centered classes that can be visited by other practitioners, they are participating in training other literacy practitioners in institutes to be held by Literacy South in the fall, 1992, and they are beginning to form teacher networks." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

At the time of writing this proposal, Literacy South staff had been, and were continuing, to work with these sites. (This work was supported by funding from the UPS Foundation and is referred to in the rest of this document as "the UPS work.") The organizations were open and willing to engage in further projects with Literacy South; the staff were familiar with Literacy South staff and approaches; and the practitioner research projects had the potential to yield useful evaluation data on the previous work on these sites. Therefore, these two sites were natural partners for the project.

The process of "selecting sites" does not sit well with the notion of practitioner-led work driving this project suggested in the previous Chapter. However, one of the realities of practitioner research in adult literacy at the present time is that most such work takes place because of an opportunity offered, and structured, from outside the work organization. In the future, we hope to see literacy practitioners and programs develop their own research programs and then seek funding and/or technical support, but this is not a model which appears to have emerged so far.

New Horizons

A third site with which Literacy South had been working, the New Horizons Program in Franklin, Virginia, was also approached but declined to participate; they did not feel ready at that stage. The thinking at the New Horizons program was instructive. They felt under a time pressure because of their other commitments and they were also under time pressure in making the decision about whether to participate in this Project. They also felt that they did not have the capacity to manage the work involved:

> "My initial concern about the grant was that we would not have the research support in house to gather the information we needed to accomplish the work. My fears were unfounded. However the overriding concern expressed by the four teachers of the program was the two lead teachers were just entering into a new teaching situation. We were several months into involvement in the UPS grant dealing with participatory styles and lesson development and teachers were not yet sure how much time would be involved in that grant. We just felt at the

> time we might not have the staff support and time support to go in and do this grant work as effectively as we like to try and do things. In retrospect, two weeks later, we wished that we had had the opportunity to go back and change that, but perhaps some other time. The critical window was about two weeks. We had two weeks to reflect on it and realized that we would really face some time constraints. We were involved in a conference at the time. We were trying to concentrate on that; we met as a staff three times during those three days to deal with the issue of this offer. We didn't have time to make a decision about whether we could perform. If we couldn't assure Literacy South that we could perform, then we shouldn't do it." [Interview with Program Administrator, October 1993]

In retrospect, they felt that the work was important and that they should have taken the opportunity to be involved:

> "The National Literacy grant dealing with the issue of teachers being their own, being facilitators of their own learning, being a major staff development component, would have been very timely for us to be involved in. Under the current federal performance indicator standards that affect all 50 states, the State of Virginia is currently just started looking at performance indicator number 6 that deals with staff development issues, and the program that has been written up by Cassie Drennon, through the State adult education office, would model very closely that work we would have been involved in with Literacy South. So we could have been well ahead of the game in at least two of the three components of our program and been knowledgeable in this area and been able to contribute to our own staff's development of this particular performance indicator and much more comfortable with the process that can be exceptionally valuable if a staff is comfortable with it. In retrospect, if we could go back and do that today, we wouldn't think twice about it." [Interview with Program Administrator, October 1993]

This was a well-considered decision at the time, although regretted afterwards. However, decisions about involvement in such work are often made under extreme pressures of time and lack of information, and in somewhat abstract circumstances. It might have made sense to have revisited the decision about participating sites when the grant was awarded, but the time pressure at that stage precluded fresh thinking around this issue.

Work Plan

While participants were expected to identify and work on their own agendas, the Project design also called for frequent interactions among the participants, and between practitioners and Literacy South staff. For example, the staff at each site would meet together in dialogue groups:

> "Site meetings will be held as dialogue groups in which each team member discusses what he or she has been investigating. These conversations will be

> structured and facilitated by the Literacy South staff person. They are intended to model a dialogue group process, and to help the project team members move from their early reflection to systematic investigation to critical analysis and, finally, to drawing conclusions." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

And there would also be periodic workshops (termed "seminars" in the proposal) at which participants from both sites would work on issues that arose at each stage of the research.

> "The second seminar of the project teams will focus on data analysis. It will provide an opportunity for the practitioner researchers to learn about formal analysis processes, and to practice those skills in preparation for dealing with their own data. It also will reinforce their membership in an emerging community of adult literacy practitioner researchers. In addition, it will provide a chance for each team to get the benefit of the perspective of the other teams as they share their work and their experience in the project to date. The third seminar will look at issues involved in writing and presenting findings and conclusions. This meeting will help team members move from analysis to dissemination, and will provide another opportunity to reinforce a sense of community and to share perspectives across projects. At the final seminar, the participants will reflect on the entire project and assess its impact as a staff development mechanism for themselves and as a program development mechanism for their programs. In addition, they will examine the extent to which they feel that this project has generated useful insights for the larger literacy education field." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

It had been planned that the Project would start with a two-day workshop but the logistics of getting together with each program were so complex that this was abandoned. Instead, there were more frequent interactions with each site. Frequency of contact was planned as a necessary element of the work:

> "In this way, the teams will be participating in a meeting of their site team or the entire project group almost every month. This level of support is important to building a sense of community and to helping new researchers develop their skills and confidence in their work." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

In addition to the dialogue groups and workshops, each practitioner at each site participated in meetings to receive technical assistance, plan workshops, and participate in interviews.

Literacy South Role

Literacy South staff were seen as having a role facilitating and focusing meetings, as well as providing technical assistance.

> "One of the Literacy South staff members will meet with the project team at each site at least four times during the project, in addition to the large seminars in which the project teams come together." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

The staff contact was driven initially by the need to get the projects started; subsequently by the need to provide support when requested, to provide technical inputs and to monitor progress; and finally, by the need to get projects completed.

In addition to meetings, paper-based communication was generated at certain points. In the chapters describing the research process in Section II, these Literacy South "interventions" are signaled as they happen.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development." Proposal submitted by Literacy South to the National Institute for Literacy, July 1992.

Fingeret, Hanna and Suzanne Cockley. *Teachers Learning: An Evaluation of ABE Staff Development in Virginia.* A report from the Virginia Adult Educators Research Network. Dayton, Virginia. July 1992.

Fingeret, Hanna and Andrew Pates. *Head and Hands: A Study of Collaborative Practitioner Research in Two North Carolina Community Colleges.* Durham, Literacy South, August 1992.

SECTION II: AN ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH

This Section contains seven chapters which provide a chronological account of the research process as it took place.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING STARTED

Timeline: November, 1992 to January, 1993

Getting Started

November was dominated by briefing the newly recruited Project Manager on the Project and on the people involved.

> Tuesday, 10 November: First planning meeting with Hanna
>
> Monday, 16 November: Conference of National Institute grant recipients in Washington.
>
> Conversations with Hanna filling in on more background.
>
> Tuesday, 17 November: Meeting with Literacy South staff to introduce the project.
>
> Thursday, 19 November: Meeting with Pearl to discuss her involvement in the project.
>
> Tuesday, 1 December: Meeting with Literacy South staff to get briefings on the work at the two sites. Only PPP was covered.
>
> Thursday, 10 December: Meeting with Hanna to review progress and discuss liaison.
>
> Friday, 11 December: Meeting with Page and Pearl to discuss financial procedures.
>
> Friday, 11 December: meeting with Jonathan for briefing on work in progress at ACC. [Research Journal entries]

During the rest of this period:

- Contacts began to be made with the two sites, meetings were negotiated and by the end of the period, were being held;
- The administrative processes and structures for the project were organized; and
- The project staff attempted to figure out what the project was all about.

Figuring Out the Project

This involved several different pieces:

- Identifying the different outcomes expected for the project.
- Clarifying the different strands involved in the work (evaluation for the UPS Project, the practitioner research itself, the staff development focus, evaluation of this project, and learning outcomes for Literacy South); understanding how these related to each other;

defining which were the responsibility of the Project Manager and which the concern of other staff at Literacy South.

- Clarifying the evaluation focus of the project. It was agreed that the evaluation processes in the project were subsidiary to the practitioners' direction of their own research activities. This was not the only evaluation being conducted for the UPS work.
- Identifying who was who at the two sites, in relation to both past and future work.
- Clarifying how the project processes and interactions with the sites would work in practice.

This was done by:

- Setting up computer files and paper-based filing systems (thus creating a structure for knowledge about the project).
- Writing analyses of the tasks involved in the project, writing a timeplan for the work and the planned interactions, and writing an evaluation plan for the National Institute for Literacy.
- Discussing the issues that emerged through review meetings, staff meetings and conversations.

The clarification continued as work started with the practitioners, and as further explanatory pieces were written for them.

The First Site Contacts

During December, the first meetings were held with the sites. From the beginning, the two sites presented different issues and worked at different paces. This does not mean that one worked faster than the other, but that their time was organized differently, subject to different influences and constraints.

Literacy South Interventions

Throughout this Project, the Literacy South staff attempted to facilitate ownership of the work by the participants, while creating structure and momentum. To make the Literacy South role as visible as possible, "interventions" are described when they happen in the story.

During this phase of the work, there were three themes to the intervention:

- There was an explanation of the interactions that were planned with the sites (workshops, dialogue groups, one-on-one meetings to provide technical assistance and interviews to assess the impact of the work).
- There was a continuing explanation of the ownership participants would have of the Project, in terms of their topic, research methods and outcomes.
- The timeline for the Project was explained.

An information sheet was prepared at the suggestion of some participants (see **Figure 1**).

Piedmont Peace Project (PPP)

PPP is based in Kannapolis, NC, two hours from Durham, and at Southern Pines, one and a half hours from Durham and two hours from Kannapolis. Face-to-face contact with the staff at PPP would not be easy. It would have to involve whole day meetings, which had to coincide with occasions when all the staff were available in one place, at the same time, usually for some other *a priori* reason.

The first meeting with PPP was on December 1 when Roni, the PPP Development Director, visited the Literacy South office in Durham. The purpose was for her to meet Andy; to share the objectives and approach of the Project; and to start the process of working together on this piece of work.

Major outcomes were the realization that:

- The PPP staff were working to a tightly defined work schedule.
- They were undergoing staff changes: the director was leaving in January for a year's study leave and roles would consequently change.
- A major focus of interest was the connections between their literacy work and their organizing work.

Andy and Pearl subsequently met with more staff by sitting in at the last of a series of workshops from the ongoing Literacy South UPS work with PPP, in Kannapolis on December, 14. Three PPP representatives were present: Roni, Liz (the Literacy Director who ran the "Study Groups") and Jolene Smith, a member of the Study Group who was being trained to run classes herself.

At the end of the session, there was an opportunity to talk about the Project with this group. They emphasized that the times available for visits and meetings were limited.

> "They have planned their time for 1993 in great detail and have some inflexibility. They wanted me to attend their program committee on January 19, to be followed by meeting to agree the form of the work, and possibly to continue the next day at their staff meeting. I tried to press for a date to meet earlier as I felt that was letting it ride too long." [Research Journal entry]

Andy was also concerned that there should be some contact with the other staff before the first meeting to start planning the work, since he did not know any of the PPP staff prior to the Project and they had not so far had any information about the Project.

In the end, the meeting on January 19 was the first occasion when Andy and Pearl would meet all the PPP staff, although they met with Roni and Billy (the community organizer based in Southern Pines) a week earlier, over lunch in Greensboro. Roni and Billy had some apprehension about the idea of "research" and about the amount of writing that would be involved; Andy emphasized that different approaches and technologies than writing could be used both for the research and for the writing.

Alamance Community College (ACC)

ACC is located in Burlington, only 40 minutes from Literacy South; Andy lives locally, 25 minutes from the College. Face-to-face contact was much easier than with PPP. Andy also knew some of the staff before the Project started.

Time was also less of an issue at ACC. Most of the literacy staff worked on part-time contracts, but the project budget provided funds to pay staff to attend meetings or to pay for a substitute teacher, if needed. On the other hand, hierarchy turned out to be an important theme from the beginning at ACC. The first contact with ACC was by phone, with Linda (the Director of Adult Literacy). The subsequent meeting at ACC between Andy and Linda on December 22 was used for familiarization, and to clarify questions about who should be invited to participate.

There are several strands to the adult literacy work at ACC, including ESL and compensatory education (adult education with adults with development disabilities). The total staff in all of these areas numbers about 60 people, too many to be involved in this Project. Therefore, there would have to be some selection. For example, which strands of work should be included? Did the people who would be included need to have been involved in the previous work with Literacy South? Most of the literacy staff are employed on part-time contracts - should they all be invited to participate or should some differentiation be made based on the number of hours worked?

It was agreed that we should meet again at the beginning of January with three other members of staff who had some management responsibilities. This meeting was held on January 5, 1993, and involved Ray (adult basic education coordinator); Marion (lead instructor and volunteer coordinator); and Bridget (site coordinator for a National Workplace Literacy grant); as well as Linda and Andy.

The meeting was enthusiastic (the first direct expressions of excitement about the Project received by the Literacy South staff from potential participants) and very task focused:

> "All very enthusiastic. Decided on staff meeting to which all should be invited (Friday January 15), for them to be able to decide if they wanted to be involved. ... decided it should only be staff working 20 hours a week or more. She wrote memo to staff there and then. I said I'd do an information piece and also bring in copies of the Literacy South Newsletter." [Research Journal entry]

Subsequently, Andy wrote an information piece for the ACC staff, a separate version of which was sent to PPP (see **Figure 1**).

Selecting the Practitioners

The selection of participants was always intended to be a decision of the individual sites and of the individuals concerned. We required that administrators be involved; the findings from the previous year's work had shown the importance of having administrators involved, both to support the work logistically and to validate the importance of the work for the staff involved.

Literacy South - Alamance Community College

National Institute for Literacy Project

Innovative Training Practices:

Practitioner Research as Staff Development

What: The National Institute for Literacy project at Literacy South provides an opportunity for a group of literacy practitioners at Alamance Community College and a group at the Piedmont Peace Project to pursue questions they have about some aspect of their work by conducting small-scale research projects. We believe that participants will add to the knowledge base and, at the same time, develop their professional ability.

Who: We hope that some of the staff at ACC who took part in the Literacy South workshops in 1992 will want to participate in this project. The staff meeting on Friday, 15 January, will provide an opportunity for you to decide if you would like to take part. Participants will be able to work on their projects individually, in pairs or in small groups.

When: The work starts now and must be completed by August 1993.

How: The participants will decide on a topic for their research, how the research will be conducted, and what methods to use. They will also make a time plan for the work; collect data; analyze it; and produce some kind of final report.

This process is common to most social research and also to other practitioner research that has been conducted by Literacy South. This does not imply however, that all the research needs to follow a traditional research format; we expect that a range of approaches will be used. So, if you do not feel comfortable with something listed above (e.g. producing reports), we can be flexible.

Assistance: Literacy South staff will provide support and assistance. This will take several forms: Literacy South staff will hold group discussions at the College; three one-day workshops will be held for the participants from both sites; and individual support will be provided to participants, when and as needed.

Costs: There is a budget to meet the costs of this work, including the cost of a substitute if you have to miss a class.

Figure 1: Information Sheet

Alamance Community College

"A program administrator's participation on each team is crucial. Practitioner research demands time and, sometimes, other resources that are not always easily available. At times it may be necessary for a substitute to be hired so that a teacher can attend meetings or conduct interviews. At other times it may

> be necessary for an administrator to facilitate the research process by helping practitioners work together in teams. In order for the larger program context to support these projects, administrators need to work closely with their staff and students to identify program structures that may hinder the process, and to enhance program structures that are necessary for the project to be a success." [Project Proposal, July 1992]

By mid-January, the teams from each site had emerged and the participants' work was beginning.

The meeting with potential participants at ACC happened quickly (as planned) on January 15. Andy, Pearl and Jereann were present from Literacy South with Linda, Marion and Bridget from ACC, in addition to three more instructors (Ann, Angela and Pete). Three others were not present but had expressed interest (Ray, John and Michelle).

The Literacy South staff had gone to the meeting expecting to make a presentation, following which there would be questions and a subsequent process of selection or self-selection. However, the group of nine ACC staff became the group who continued to participate in the research. Since a letter had gone to all staff working twenty hours or more, this group was self-selected. Whatever processes might have led some people not to participate were not visible.

The meeting focused on the approach we were using (which had been outlined in the information sheet circulated prior to the meeting). The participants wanted to talk about the topics they might work on. It was already evident that participants were thinking about doing their own individual pieces, though they were also considering shared concerns. Two were preoccupied with questions they could study at their workplace literacy site. The next meeting would focus on defining topics for research.

It is interesting to note that the people who had difficulty in attending that first meeting would be the same people who would frequently not attend, or be late for meetings throughout the Project (despite the provision for teaching commitments to be covered by the project budget). One participant, Michelle, was working on her teaching degree through this period, an overriding commitment which could not be changed. Everyone

else would attend regularly and promptly, except for a period of maternity leave mid-way through the project for Angela.

Piedmont Peace Project

The process started differently at PPP. On January 19, Pearl and Andy attended the planned meetings of the program committee and the publicity committee which involved all the program staff (Roni, Liz, Billy and Cheryl, a community organizer working in Kannapolis). The director had already left to start her year's study leave and the administrator did not join the meeting, although she was involved in some of the Study Group meetings.

It became explicit during this meeting that all the staff would be involved in the Project; no further selection process was needed. It also became clear that all the staff would work together on the same piece, and that it would be used to generate insights into their work. The content of the meeting focused on the topics they wanted to pursue.

The staff had held a retreat (since the meeting in December) at which they had planned their work and time for 1993 in great detail, and apparently without allowing time for work on this Project. By this stage, problems with time and the logistics of meeting had already emerged as dominant themes for Literacy South's interactions with PPP.

Issues Arising

Importance of First Impressions

First impressions turned out to be real representations of issues that would continue to show throughout the Project. Some of these have been alluded to already (such as the difficulty of finding time to meet with PPP, and the patterns of attendance and absence at ACC). Our experience suggests that a period of review and reflection early in the project would have been valuable. Such reflection could have focused on the likely outcomes for all concerned and, more important, on the practical obstacles that might be faced.

The need to get moving and to honor prior commitments made at the time the proposal was written obscured the realization that there could be

value in reviewing the selection of sites for the Project before getting started. In general, one year was not enough time to engage in planning as well as conducting the projects at the sites and writing the final report.

Uncertainty in the Early Stages

Uncertainty characterizes the early stages of a practitioner research project. This uncertainty exists both for the project staff, who do not know what work the practitioners will engage in, and for the practitioners themselves, who may not have engaged in such work previously.

In this case, previous projects at Literacy South provided important examples of and experience with practitioner research. This underlines the importance of building this work year by year, of developing networks of experienced practitioner researchers, of building continuity, and of developing a practitioner research context.

The Use of Writing to Clarify the Work Needed

Andy used writing extensively during this phase in his attempts not just to clarify the tasks that needed to be completed but to create the Project itself. For example, he compiled calendars and lists of tasks that needed to be completed by the Project staff; information sheets for the participants; and a discussion document outlining the issues involved in the Project, for Literacy South staff. Throughout the Project, as in literacy education, writing was a tool to help organize the work and structure the thinking.

Prior Experience

Participants' expectations about how to do the work and what would be expected of them were influenced in the early stages by their own experience of research, and their expectations of what research involved.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development": Proposal submitted by Literacy South to the National Institute for Literacy, July 1992.

Evaluation Plan submitted by Literacy South to the National Institute for Literacy, December 1992.

What is Involved in the Project? Discussion Document prepared for Literacy South Staff, Andrew Pates, January 1993.

Summary Work Plan, Andrew Pates, December 1992.

Calendar, Andrew Pates, December 1992.

Information Sheet for Staff at ACC, Andrew Pates, January 1993 (reproduced above).

CHAPTER 4

WHAT DO WE WANT TO INVESTIGATE?

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Timeline: January to February, 1993

This phase began with meetings to talk about research topics and ended with a workshop on February 17, planned to address both research questions and methods, and, therefore, intended to mark a transition from thinking about a piece of research to doing it. However, the workshop turned out to be a transition in the process of the overall Project and, therefore, is dealt with separately in the next Chapter.

The activity of the period was marked by group meetings with the participants followed by individual meetings with ACC staff to help them figure out their projects; and by planning for the workshop.

Tuesday, 19 January: Meeting Kannapolis, PPP.

Monday, 25 January: Meeting, ACC staff. Everyone talked about their research projects.

Wednesday, 3 February: Meeting, Ann, ACC.

Thursday, 4 February: Meeting, Angela, ACC.

Friday, 5 February: Meeting, Bridget, ACC.

Meeting, Pete, ACC.

Meeting, Michelle and Ray, ACC.

Meeting, Marion, ACC.

Meeting, John, ACC.

Saw Linda while I was there and fixed a time to meet.

Monday, 15 February: Call to Marion at ACC to see if I needed to send a note to ACC people about the workshop; she'd already done it.

Wednesday, 17 February: Meeting, Linda, ACC.

Workshop. [Research Journal entries]

The dominant themes were definition and clarification.

Work at PPP

The selection of the PPP research project happened during the meeting described in the previous Chapter on January 19. Andy and Pearl sat through meetings of the publicity and program committees, to get a sense of the work in progress. This was followed by a meeting about the National Institute for Literacy Project.

Before the meetings began, however, there was great excitement over an upcoming piece of work. PPP had received support from a program offered by the PEN Organization in New York. It involved three visits to PPP by writers; PEN would supply copies of a recent book by each writer which would provide the focus for Study Group sessions prior to the writer's visit. The first writer (Tina McElroy) had visited in 1992 and the visit had not involved any controversy, apart from some discussion of the use of "bad language" in the author's work.

The writer slated to be visiting in early 1993 was Randall Kenan, a young African-American writer from Eastern North Carolina. Copies of his book *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* had arrived before Christmas and had been handed to members of the Study Group at the pre-Christmas gathering. The staff had now had a chance to read the book and were agitated by the fact that some of the stories dealt with homosexual themes, and that one story was very erotic. The members of the Study Group were elderly members of the local African-American community, devout Christians, and not, the PPP staff thought, likely to be comfortable with the sexual content of the book.

> "Roni bubbling about the Randall Kenan issue: how should they handle elderly... people to whom they had given writing, some of which was quite explicit." [Research Journal entry]

The mood was anxious and agitated over the possible impact of the book.

The group did not know what it wanted to focus on as a topic of research; Andy facilitated the process by feeding back the issues which had featured in the conversations so far, both during and outside the two meetings. The group selected two issues, although they did not formulate a research question. They also began a discussion of how they might work on their project and agreed to tape some of their work and to bring these audio and

video recordings to a meeting on February 9. The tape recorder did not work at this meeting; the notes were reconstructed and shared with the PPP staff later:

> "When we met on January 19, Pearl and I listened to your meetings and identified a number of recurring themes in your discussions:
>
> • How you deal with difficult issues in your work (your use of Randall Kenan's book in your study group, and a visit from him, were the immediate focus, the issue which was exercising you that day).
>
> • How you set up teaching programs, which seemed in turn to contain two distinct issues:
>
> - The order of events, what to do first and when; the techniques to use; how to teach an ESL class;
>
> - The ownership of a new class, which in turn had a bearing on how it might be set up; you could set up a class and then attract students to the class or you could meet with a group of non-English speakers (probably Latinos) in Kannapolis and discuss their needs with them, and then devise a class to meet those needs.
>
> • Your preoccupation with the role of language; whose language were you using; how you were working to create voices that could transcend language barriers as in your health project or in your economic democracy work.
>
> • Your work in Midway, what you are learning, how you are learning it, who makes decisions, how you feel about it. Billy saw this as an evaluation piece on your work in Midway.
>
> You thought you would want to pursue the first issue and the last though we did not at that stage formulate a research question. We did agree however to meet again, at which time we would look at some video tape of a meeting at Midway and some audio tape of your work on the Randall Kenan material, to include some planning meetings (Liz, Roni and Alice) and some study group sessions." [Extract from letter to PPP, February 23, 1993]

The difficulty of formulating a precise research question subsequently seemed to hinder the work; a clear focus never emerged.

Work at ACC

The dominant style of work at ACC during this period was of formal meetings focused on Literacy South's agenda. The work in this phase began with a staff meeting on January 25, at which all the participants were present, except John and Michelle. Each person talked about the project they were thinking about.

- **John:** Linda presented John's project idea which was for a study of the impact of the transition program for special education students that he had been working with in local high schools.

- **Angela** was interested in comparing older and younger students to see whether the length of time out of school affected their learning rates. Angela had started by doing an ERIC search and found little on the relationship between age and learning rates. She was also interested in the motivating factors that affect success in ABE.

- **Ann** wanted to know how the workplace literacy class that she teaches at Burlington Industries (BI) affects students on the job and in their own life.

- **Bridget**, based on her work developing workplace literacy curriculum at BI, wanted to study whether the work they are engaged in really participatory?

- **Marion** wanted to know how ABE instructors feel about their role.

- **Michelle and Ray** planned to work together. They wanted to know what is distinctly different about learner-centered instruction; come up with a working definition; determine whether it is a better approach; and develop some basic training.

- **Pete** wanted to know about the negative experiences of ABE students in their early education.

- **Linda** wanted to write a position paper on community colleges and ABE.

This was the first time that the ACC staff had articulated their research ideas in this group. While they had clearly defined topics for their projected work, there were still problems:

- Many of the questions were very broad and unfocused.

- Many of the projected pieces were overambitious, involving several sequential and interconnected pieces of work which would have involved full-time research for the whole year.

- Some were overambitious in approach. For example, one planned to do in-depth interviews with 25 people (one person would subsequently start by planning interviews with 200 people).

- Many people mixed the idea of a research question with the methods they would use, starting, for example, by saying: "I'm going to do a questionnaire" without being clear about what it was they were trying to find out or why they wanted to use this method.

- Several people saw connections between their work and someone else's and made the deduction that this implied that their research pieces should be interconnected.

These issues are common at the beginning of a research process for people without research experience (and often for people with such experience!) and these issues are not described here as a point of criticism.

They are noted as issues that likely will commonly arise in such work; they can be predicted and planned for. These issues permeated this work for the following weeks, and provided a focus for the project facilitators. For some of the participants, some of these issues were not worked out until late in the Project, affecting the facility with which they were able to complete their work.

Additionally, a tension was evident from the beginning between different approaches to research. One participant, for example, had recently completed her Masters degree and was influenced by the quantitative methods involving the use of tests and measures she saw used and taught at the university. The Literacy South approach to research, on the other hand, tends to be ethnographic and qualitative, based on the understanding that in order to find out how things happen and what they mean, we must use research based on people's actions, words and insights. Early in the meeting Linda offered the knowledge that there were two distinct approaches to research and Andy offered examples of different ways research could be conducted, including references to "life history" research in the context of the participant who wanted to look at older learners.

In the following week, all the participants had individual technical support sessions with Andy where they sharpened up their questions.

- **Ann** was confused because Ray and Bridget both wanted to piggy back on her work. We clarified that she should pursue her own questions and not worry about the others.

- **Angela** wanted to compare older and younger learners. During this meeting, she wanted to know more about other approaches to research and picked up on the reference to life history-based research. Andy promised to bring her a book on the subject.

- **Bridget** had a complex of things she wanted to do, and several inter-connected questions. She was interested in the process of curriculum development; in the degree to which the work at Burlington Industries is work related and also participatory; in the perceptions of the BI staff about her work; and in models she had already half formed in her mind.

- **Pete** wanted to interview his students to find out about their formative negative experiences during their schooling and how these affected their subsequent learning. He had planned to use a highly structured questionnaire which asked about each year of schooling. Andy persuaded him to think about a more open type of interview, and also to ask about all experiences, not to start with the assumption that they would all be negative.

- **Michelle and Ray** planned to work together. They have different roles and Michelle was also involved with her teaching degree. Andy asked about the issues that would arise

from working together but no conclusions were reached. They wanted to see how much the idea of learner-centered instruction is present in the work going on at ACC. They wanted to start with a survey of all staff to glean definitions, followed by focus groups, video taping classes and to be completed by writing training packages. Andy urged simplicity and suggested that they concentrate on video taping classes. This was the first time that Michelle and Andy met.

- **Marion** wanted to look at the experience of teaching ABE and had decided to conduct some focus groups. Andy suggested she also keep a journal and a log of all the comings and goings in the room where she works, a strategically located point where many interactions take place.

- **John** taught compensatory education and helped students to find jobs. He wanted to see what they needed to prepare for adult life and planned to interview them all (over 200). Andy suggested that he think of a couple of focus groups instead and that he also interview some ex-compensatory education students who were now working. This was the first time that John and Andy met.

- **Linda** and Andy did not meet to talk about her research until the morning of the workshop. She was most preoccupied about the time it would take her to do a piece but also about how much she would be in control of the process. She had been engaged in a program of graduate study which had been a very negative experience. She was reassured by learning that she could do interviews by phone, that her secretary could help her with logistics, and that she could change the question after she had started, in response to early findings.

Literacy South Interventions

At both sites, the early intervention involved laying down a framework within which the project would work, and in giving responsibility for research questions, methods and outcomes to the participants.

At PPP, the intervention consisted of facilitating the interaction at the meetings in order to get the project moving. The group was encouraged to be more precise about what they were trying to find out, but the Literacy South facilitators did not insist on particular outcomes at this stage.

Because the focus was the organization's work, in which the actuality of the work was difficult to separate from the organization's rhetoric about intentions, and because the whole team was involved, it proved difficult to focus sharply on what any one person thought they should do. This was in contrast to the work at ACC where everyone was organizing their own separate individual piece.

At ACC the intervention was more focused because of the individual interactions around which the work settled. The one-on-one interaction

meant both that each person's work was more totally the agenda for discussion, but also that the discussions were more individually focused on the person and the work they planned to do. There was greater pressure from Andy about being open to qualitative methods, and about the need to keep research questions simple and limited.

Andy was concerned at this point about manipulating the participants; this feeling was reinforced by continual comments prefaced by "Andy said,...". This led to a tension for Literacy South about the meaning of the practitioners owning their work, and how this could work while Literacy South was defining the project. That tension never arose with PPP since they so clearly owned their project and the process; the tension at PPP however, became whether they were sufficiently committed to the process for it to have much substance.

Issues Arising

Expert Model or Participant Driven

The dominant issue for the Literacy South team that emerged during this phase of the work was that of control:

> "I am uneasy about the NIL project, because the whole edifice seems to be supported by me. I am not sure to what extent there is autonomous work going on (but see Marion's initiative and also the fact that the ACC crowd had put together their ideas and have been struggling with them) but more important, I am not clear to what extent any collaborative work is going on to provide a source of support and interaction about their work among the participants. The DCC project had the merit that negotiation between the two sides of the research teams ensured that the participants had to struggle with each other about the nature and purpose of their work. Here it reverts to an expert model as everything is having to be negotiated with me." [Research Journal entry]

This is a fundamental issue in any learner-centered work and remained an issue throughout the project.

Early Intentions

In this phase of the work, participants had strongly formed ideas about the focus of their projects even if they were not well defined. Most people's research remained true to their initial intentions.

Quantitative or Qualitative Approaches to Research

For many people there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that one or another approach to social and educational research is preferable, and much good work involves both types of research. However, the participants in this project were more familiar with quantitative approaches to research while the facilitators were more favorably disposed to a qualitative approach.

Individual or Group Focus

One theme that started to become apparent was that the process of practitioner research was different when it was group driven than when it was the separate concern of a number of individuals. In this case, the group work was encased in a small organization where group decision making and team work were the norm, whereas the individual work was taking place in a context where individual action was the norm.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development": Letter to Staff at PPP, Andrew Pates, February 23, 1993 (reproduced above).

CHAPTER 5

A CHANGE POINT: THE FEBRUARY WORKSHOP

Timeline: February 17, 1993

The Project design included three day-long workshops for the participants from both sites. The first of these was held on February 17, and involved eight people from ACC (Michelle was not present), two from PPP (Cheryl and Billy were not present) and four from Literacy South (Jereann joined Hanna, Andy and Pearl for the event). The workshop was intended to explore the questions that the practitioners wanted to work on and identify issues that would be expected to arise next. As it turned out, it also marked a transition in the way the Project was conducted and became the only occasion when the teams from the two sites would work together.

The Program

The workshop was planned by Hanna and Andy, and the initial plan addressed four principal themes:

- The nature of research and the reasons for engaging in practitioner research;
- Approaches to research and the reasons for favoring qualitative approaches in practitioner research;
- The idea of and need for a research question;
- The status of each participant's research question.

The workplan is reproduced at the end of this Chapter (see **Figure 4**). It was, however, changed a couple of days before the workshop. Andy and Hanna felt that the planned program covered the issues that *should be* dominant at this stage of the work, and that the participants *ought to be* thinking about according to an academic research model. However, it did not necessarily address the issues that the participants *were concerned with*, and so did not realize a model of practitioner research where the activity was owned and directed by the practitioners involved. The program change was intended to enable an agenda to be developed that would meet the practitioners' actual, felt needs. This reflected the anxiety that had been emerging during the

preceding month that the practitioners' work was proceeding on the basis of Andy's leadership, and that they were looking to him for the answers about what, how and when they should be doing things.

An entry from the research journal on February 16 explains the thinking behind this adjustment to the program:

> "Whilst we have a well worked out workplan for the workshop, I am uneasy about it because it is based on an expert model. We are the experts telling them, the practitioners, what they need. If it is genuinely participative, if it is genuinely practitioner research, they should be deciding what they want and using us as resource people to provide the support they need. It is a genuine dilemma of such work because it is (by definition?) always organized as programs/projects by an academic institution or because of a grant; it is uncommon (currently unlikely?) for practitioners to spontaneously take the initiative and start such work. Given this context, the methodology of the project should encourage leadership by the practitioners, and an early event in a project should be a transformation process.
>
> Hanna says this is currently a major issue in practitioner research.
>
> As a consequence, we decided to scrap the workplan, and after the introductions, to turn it over to them to negotiate the program. We would ask one of them to chair the session and we would respond. We would need to touch base regularly during the day to adjust the program as we went, and would invite two of them to share this with us so that we weren't huddling separately to direct the event."

The revised program (see **Figure 2**) was intended to pass ownership of the workshop to the participants, both by negotiating their immediate needs for the day, and by passing control of the process to them.

The Event

Andy and Hanna introduced the workshop and explained the plan. Participants listed their concerns during the first workshop exercise (see **Figure 3**). The facilitation passed from person to person during the rest of the day. However, the pace slowed down as the day progressed, and many of the participants experienced increasing frustration, anxiety, and in some cases anger. Subsequently, we wrote to the participants asking for feedback about the day and, based on their responses, we analyzed the workshop. The rest of the Chapter is based on this evaluation; the quotations are taken from the participant evaluation forms.

Revised program

After introductions, we will negotiate the agenda with the participants.

Andy to introduce the following points:

- We have a detailed workplan. It would have covered why we do practitioner research and ways of doing research.
- However, we are uneasy about it because it is based on an expert model. So far in this project, we have devised it, set it up, organized it, got you involved, asked you to do things; in other words we have decided and instigated. However, practitioner research is about you deciding what you want to do, grounded in your experience and needs, and how to do it. In this model you should use us as technical support. (diagram)
- Now I know it's unrealistic for that to have happened from the start; the reality is that this project is happening because of a NIL grant Hanna applied for. However, if we don't do something soon, we will maintain the technical expert model, so we need to try and effect a transformation. Since this is the first time we are all together, and since you we have all been thinking about the work for a couple of months now, this seems an appropriate point to do this.
- We would like to pass the discussion over to you so that you can say what you would like from the day, what you would like it to achieve. We will then work to create a program, or to recreate the program we have, to meet your needs.
- To do this, we would like one of you to facilitate the discussion.
- Possible questions:

- what are your concerns right now
- what do you want to know
- what outcomes would you like to achieve today
- what other questions would you like to add to the list to get the discussion started
- who will lead the discussion.

Later: Can we have two people to work with us to plan the program to meet the identified needs.

Later still: How can we maintain your ownership of the project?

Figure 2: Revised Workplan for February Workshop

OUR QUESTIONS - GETTING STARTED

- What sort of data will I get from asking questions?
- How can I frame good questions?
- How does prior relationship affect interviews/interactions?
- How do you find out what people really think? (i.e. dealing with bias)
- What is the bias here?
- How does it affect the work?

WHAT TO DO WITH OUR DATA?

What's to keep, what's valuable here, who's the audience?

- When I've got my data, what do I do next?
- How will I present it?
- What do I do with it all?
- What is the next step?
- How do I say I know something?
- How to deal with language and terminology, where there are differences in acceptable usage. Everyday language cf formal, accepted language.
- How does language affect learning?

WHAT ARE WE AS RESEARCHERS?

How can I sell my project?

- Where should we be going?
- How does this fit into a bigger picture?
- How does my agenda fit into the larger picture?

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

- We want feedback on our own projects.
- Affirmation please, are we doing OK?

PROCESS

- Why did you throw out the workplan?

Source: handout prepared after the workshop, based on the flipchart record made during the day.

Figure 3: Participants' Concerns at February Workshop

The Evaluation of the Workshop

We analyzed the evaluation responses inductively, sorting the answers according to the issues they addressed. The analysis was based on a limited, though rich, set of data, because:

- most of the data came from individuals working at ACC;
- the data from PPP was comparatively thin, as they only had two members present and these provided one joint evaluation;
- there was no written evaluation from the literacy director at ACC.

Therefore, the analysis:

- did not offer insights which might provide a comparative view between the two institutions represented;
- did not offer an administrative perspective from ACC.

The evaluation provided us with points of importance for planning subsequent interactions with the sites, and issues to be studied in more depth as the work proceeded, from the perspective of the workshop participants. The evaluation material addressed issues concerning:

The participants' experience, including their frustrations;

The event itself; and

The ideas being explored.

The Participants' Experience and Frustrations

Many participants experienced frustration during the workshop for a variety of reasons to do with both the process being used and the relationship of the day's agenda to their research projects.

> "Some of us seemed to be confused - not knowing what to expect next."
>
> "To be honest, I'm not sure - I just feel at times that I am not sure what I'm supposed to be doing."
>
> "The continual asking of us what do you want to know, and not having any structure as to help us with our projects."
>
> "... the workshop not meeting expectations ... feeling like guinea pigs"

The process being used for the workshop was explicitly identified as the source of anxiety:

> "Some members were frustrated at the design of the meeting"
>
> "When you all let go it caused real anxiety for us because we didn't want to take control. ... people were not committed to the strategy"
>
> "We were put in a position that felt defensive, hard all round."

Some participants addressed the workshop's focus on control:

> "We were offered the chance to practice a participatory approach on ourselves, and we had some natural struggles doing it."
>
> "The 'task oriented' people were just about ready to do anything, since they felt we weren't actually accomplishing anything up until that point."
>
> "Frustration - we're used to agenda-sizing the heck out of our meetings because we feel we're rushed for time - and some of us don't mind the more open meetings because they're different."

A few participants identified the Literacy South staff role as being directly related to their frustration:

> "I wanted more guidance from you."

Other participants welcomed the way the facilitators handled their role:

> "Thought Andy and Hanna handled well because very dangerous."
>
> "Facilitators didn't seem flustered or impatient with us (even though some members were frustrated at the design of the meeting)."

and even acknowledged that the facilitators were not solely responsible for the process:

> "I don't feel any blame should be placed, since the group made the decision as a group."

In a couple of cases, participants explored the relationship between facilitators and participants:

> "For me, the opportunity to FIRST find out what I really think and THEN hearing Literacy South's views avoids what I think is my tendency to just accept Literacy South's opinion as "the way" to do this work. I believe that being participatory means that we explore our own conceptions of the work, and that includes having the freedom to learn about our misconceptions. Not by being reprimanded for 'thinking wrong' but by being offered the opportunity to

compare the different viewpoints and coming to our own conclusions about something."

ACC and PPP are very different organizations; they have different missions, structures, relationships to the community, relationships with learners, governing structures and purposes for participation in literacy work. The participation of two such very different organizations in the workshop, without the differences being made clear and accounted for at the beginning, caused some serious problems:

> "We got off track when we started with PPP's research question, and when it became evident that their organization is very different from ours, people started focusing on the differences rather than on what we could learn from one another."
>
> "Critical to get to know the other group. I learned something about the people there. Difficulties of participatory work when two agencies not speaking common language."
>
> The tensions between ACC and PPP when we started discussing their organization and had to take so much time to define what PPP is (and is not). To me, we needed to focus more on the task at hand, which was to address their research question. ... the group should have helped get us back on track, since we had decided that the participants would all sort of take ownership of the process."

The Event

The event was welcomed and enjoyed for the opportunity to meet and talk:

> "Being together - discussion time."
>
> "The give and take of ideas; the willingness of everyone to contribute."
>
> "The food and fellowship."
>
> "Getting to know one another."

The discussion was also valued, though not always because it was helpful:

> "I enjoyed hearing everyone talk about their project or what they 'thought' was their project but I'm not sure how that helped me with my own project."
>
> "A lot of discussion - which was interesting - but I'm not sure it helped me advance in my own project."

The fact that discussion need not necessarily lead to specific concrete outcomes was appreciated:

> "I enjoy it at times; sometimes it seems we are talking around things and not being definitive. Perhaps that has its merits also. Discussion is, after all, not a process that necessarily resolves things. It does give everyone a voice, however."

And the fact that some people were not actively involved in the discussion was a point of worry:

> "Some of us talked a lot and others hardly said anything. ... I realize that the group didn't make conscious efforts to bring those folks in more. This is the same thing that often happens in the classroom."

The first significant event of the workshop was the Literacy South staff's relinquishing control:

> "When you all let go it caused real anxiety for us because we didn't want to take control."

This was immediately followed by the question of who would facilitate the sessions:

> "... few of us wanted to facilitate the discussion, so (an administrator) stepped in."

The agenda and process were negotiated, a process which some found hard to appreciate as relevant to the purpose of the workshop:

> "Putting into practice the idea of participants being the ones to set the agenda, rather than the agenda being set by the ones in charge."

> "When we were asked if we'd like to set our own agenda, the group started asking what we wanted to get out of the workshop. By the time everyone had a chance to express their desires, the 'task oriented' people were just about ready to do anything, since they felt we weren't actually accomplishing anything up until that point."

This led to a mismatch of expectations for those whose primary focus was the mechanics of research; this led to many leaving feeling frustrated:

> "We didn't have specific expectations but had expectations of learning something. Couldn't go away and say this is a new task or a new skill. Didn't feel that happened. It was not our fault because we let go of the process."

> "It (the meeting) could have been more substantive. We may need more concrete leadership to resolve our questions."

"We were offered the chance to practice a participatory approach on ourselves, and we had some natural struggles doing it. I think people didn't realize that it would be this hard, since they were really frustrated at the end."

Participants did make suggestions for subsequent workshops:

"Perhaps at the next workshop, it would be helpful to have an agenda and for you to have time to work with each person on his/her project."

"Next time, have an agenda and 1-2 people picked out to write/post comments."

"To be clear at the start of the day what we want to accomplish. Perhaps we should appoint a task master to keep us on task. The task master might be asked to poll us when we got off track and make the group decide at that point whether it's more important to address 1) the immediate concerns or 2) the task at hand."

The Ideas

There were two ideas being worked on in the workshop - the process of research and, introduced by the change of method, the participatory process.

The majority of the people present were preoccupied with their own individual agendas. The participants whose focus was primarily research wanted more direct discussion of research issues:

"Each person talk about his project and give them some suggestions about how to go about researching certain topics. Also, share with use projects other people have done in past and how they went about doing their research."

"I felt that the meeting I had with Andy helped more than the (workshop)."

"I'd like to hear about other projects briefly and ask questions about mine."

"More time spent on the structural approach to our projects."

"More discussion on practical research matters: phrasing questions, format, applicability of data gathered, how to write final report."

"We were able to see by example the preliminary steps in formulating a research topic."

Some participants were interested to exploring the nature of participatory work:

"To talk about what 'participatory' means to each of us and how that actually appears in practice. At points during the day we should ask ourselves whether we are doing the task in a participatory manner or not. And whether it is important to us to be participatory. It also seems to me that it's a matter of

people's ideas of the boundaries of decision making. (What decisions are better made by the group and what are the domain of the supervisors?) Maybe people need to ask why is participatory so important?"

"People may have understood 'participatory approach' as something different than what we were doing that day, and felt we weren't on track. Or at least they didn't like the track we had discovered. I think we discovered that it is a painful process of trying to stay focused and of keeping egos aside and personal agendas in perspective."

Issues Arising

Task Focus of Practitioners

Participants felt a need to focus directly on the immediate research process and tasks. Literacy South was concerned with the process and ownership of practitioner research. We needed to share our concern in a way that did not block the practitioners' ability to engage in their research projects.

Group Activities

The outcomes expected from group activities need to be clearly defined and they need to be shared with the participants in advance. The process being used in group activities also needs to be clearly identified, and shared; areas of uncertainty (keeping to agenda, time keeping, facilitation) should be planned for. However, there was not a need to revert to a process in which Literacy South decided the content of events unilaterally and controlled their working.

Bringing Together Two Organizations

The relationship between the two organizations was raised in the evaluation, but not addressed. There was no immediately evident need for the two organizations work together and it was decided that they should be treated separately at this stage.

Subsequent Actions

After the workshop, a number of actions were taken to address the interaction issues. We decided that the next workshop (possibly workshops) would not involve both sites. If, subsequently, there appeared to be reasons

for holding a joint workshop or meeting, this could be arranged - such eventualities did not arise.

The way in which the Project was managed at each site diverged at this point to take account both of the difference in approach to the work at each site, and the differences in the way time was managed.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

- Workshop 1, Outline Program.
- Workshop 1, Revised Program.
- Workshop 1, Evaluation Report, Andrew Pates, April 29, 1993.

Notes

Workplan

10:00-10:05 Welcomes: Hanna/Linda
Linda to the College
Hanna to the day

10:05-10:30 Ice breaker: Hanna/Andy (Andy leads)
"Introduce yourself: where do you work; what do you do; what was the last book you read."

10:30-10:40 Brainstorm about research: Hanna/Andy (Hanna leads, Andy records)
"Share all the things you associate with the word research."

10:40-11:00 What can we learn from this exercise?: Hanna/Andy (Hanna leads, Andy records)
"Where do these feelings come from?
Do they raise questions about who's in charge?
Does that lead to a model where we can have ownership of the research we do?
That leads to the notion of practitioner research."

11:00-11:30 Why do practitioner research? Group exercise: Hanna/Andy. (Andy introduces exercise and leads report back, Hanna records)

Group exercise: In three groups of five (each to include one person from PPP and LitS), discuss the question "Why do practitioner research?" Record your answers on a flipchart sheet. (10 minutes)

Report back: Each group reports back. (Can we identify the degree to which the notion of insider/outsider knowledge features?) (10 minutes)

11:30-12:45 Your questions: Hanna/Andy. (Hanna leads, Andy records)
In research groupings or pairs: "What is the state of your question? How is it grounded in your experience? How will investigating it contribute to your practice?" (45 minutes)
Report back: (30 minutes)

12:45-1:30 lunch

1:30- 2:00 Refining your question: Hanna/Andy (Andy leads)
In organizational groups: What is your question now? Do you want to change or develop it in any way? As a result of answering your question, what outcomes will you produce? No feedback.

2:00-3:45 Methods: Hanna/Andy (Hanna leads/Andy records)
Brainstorm a list of all the research methods we can think of. (15 minutes)
Micro research project: Divide group into two, one quantitative, one qualitative. Do a piece of research in pairs. Choose a qualitative/quantitative method according to which half of the group you are in: Research question: "What elements of your education were formative in creating the person you are now?" Research subjects: Hanna, Jereann, Pearl and Andy. (60 minutes)
Report back: What did you learn? How is what you learned different according to the method you used? (30 minutes)

3:45-4:00 Closure: Hanna/Andy (Andy leads/Hanna records)
i) Dates for next two workshops.
ii) What we expect to happen next.
iii) What we want in terms of budgets.
iv) Readings.
v) Site representatives to be part of a steering group.
vi) Any other business.

Notes: Session to be taped (Pearl) and photographed (Jerry Savage)

Figure 4: Original Workplan for February Workshop

CHAPTER 6

METHODS: HOW SHOULD WE CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH?

Timeline: February to April, 1993

During this phase of the work, everybody was working hard. The project directors at each site were sorting out their budgets. The Literacy South staff were initially preoccupied with disentangling the outcomes of the workshop and reestablishing good working relationships with the sites. In addition, the first evaluation interviews had to be conducted. Against this background, the participants became busy defining the methods that they would use for their projects. It was therefore a period that started with differing preoccupations among the various actors, but which came together with a common focus towards the end.

The research journal shows a busy period involving several types of activity:

Tuesday, 9 February: Meeting Kannapolis, PPP, to see how we could review their work.

[Wednesday, 17 February: Workshop.]

Wednesday, 3 March: Took letter to ACC.

Thursday, 4 March: Posted letter to PPP. Phone calls with Marion and Linda, ACC.

Tuesday, 9 March: Meeting, Hanna and Linda.

Wednesday, 10 March: Phone call with Marion to set up meetings.

Thursday, 11 March: Meetings Ann, Bridget, Linda, Marion.

Friday, 12 March: Meetings Marion, Ray.

Monday, 15 March: Meetings Linda, Pete.

Wednesday, 17 March: Meeting Roni, Liz, Billy at Southern Pines.

Friday, 19 March: Meeting Ray, Michelle and John re video taping of their project.

Friday 26 March: Meeting Roni, PPP, in Durham, re their budget.

Thursday, 1 April: Phone call to Marion to see if anyone had expressed interest in a meeting. Nobody had.

Friday, 16 April: First dialogue group at ACC.

Tuesday, 27 April - Wednesday, 29 April: Writing evaluation report for workshop and half-year report for National Institute. [Research Journal entries]

Andy drafted a letter to go to both sites on February 23 suggesting that we should develop dialogue journals as a way of clarifying issues on an on-going and shared basis; he did not send it straight away, however, because he felt that it didn't seem quite right. We finally figured out that Literacy South should be working differently with each site. Therefore, different versions of the letter were sent to ACC on March 3, and to PPP on March 5.

The confusion of this period was captured in Andy's research journal on March 2:

> "I haven't sent the letters out yet because they feel wrong. It shouldn't be the same letter to each site as the needs are different at each site. It may be right for PPP because that's where communication is difficult. It isn't for ACC because we haven't explored our communication possibilities. Instead, decided to broach a dialogue journal at a dialogue group, if that materializes. I am preoccupied with the process and yet feel I have nothing to work with." [Research Journal entry]

Work at ACC

Reestablishing Communication

The interactions at ACC took place first through individual tutorials, and later through the first of a series of dialogue group meetings. This format was suggested in the letter to the participants on March 3 (see **Figure 5**).

The mood of the Literacy South team was still tentative at this stage. We understood the need to provide structure but did not want to insist on participants meeting more often than they needed and wanted. We were anxious about the participants formulating their questions and defining the scope of their research. We were treading very carefully because we did not fully understand how participants were feeling about the Project since the workshop.

Andy took this letter to ACC and gave it to Marion for distribution. (She had emerged as the appropriate channel of communication.) She also asked participants if they would like individual sessions and, if so, she scheduled them. Pearl also was in contact with Marion to arrange for the first evaluation interviews. Two days later, Andy phoned Marion to start setting

appointments and agreed to speak directly to Linda about whether she would also like to meet.

"I thought it would be useful to write to you all to clarify how we think we should be working with you on your research projects. I had been expecting two types of interaction at ACC, in addition to the three cross site workshops:

- Continued individual sessions where I could work with you on your project, as needed by you.
- A periodic session (six weekly?) where we could all share and reflect on what is happening in the project at ACC.

I am happy to continue with this model if it meets your needs and have asked Marion to arrange times to meet for those of you who would like this; we would fix a time for a group session later in March. At that meeting, we could also agree times for me to be at the College, probably every three weeks, one session for individual or small group discussions, the next for the group meetings. I will of course continue to be available by phone, or for extra individual sessions on request.

I would add that there will be other forms of communication going on as well:

- I will need to continue to talk to Linda about the overall project management, especially with regard to the budget.
- We will be talking to Bridget and Marion about the next workshop, when we have received the feedback we asked for.

We are developing some further ideas about ways of working with you on the processes involved in this project and should like to share these with you at the next group meeting.

At our next individual sessions, I would like to generate a brief summary of your research question, how you plan to approach your data collection, and what resources and support you think you will need."

Figure 5: Letter sent to ACC in March

Linda told Andy that she was angry, and that she was anxious about the amount of time that staff were being asked to give and the range of processes in which Linda was not involved. She also expressed discomfort with working with an organization (PPP) that had a very different frame of

reference. This conversation was the beginning of a process that led to a much closer and more effective relationship with the practitioners at ACC.

Andy, Linda and Hanna met following the telephone call to discuss the issues that Linda had identified. It was agreed that subsequent workshops would be held separately for the two sites. More important, it led to an agreement that Andy and Linda would meet regularly to review issues that arose; that the staff could meet for dialogue groups; that the staff could have individual meetings with Andy for technical assistance; and that Pearl could conduct interviews with the staff to assist in evaluating the Project as long as it was made clear that it was not the practitioners who were being evaluated. Linda's research for the project was also discussed; she decided to use the project as an opportunity to reflect on the experience of having a practitioner research project at ACC.

During a subsequent session at ACC to conduct individual meetings, Linda asked Andy to touch base, and review what we were doing:

> "Linda asked to see me between seeing her staff. We covered a number of areas, mainly about the different types of meeting we would be having. She asked about the purpose of today's individual meetings and I described them as technical assistance on instructors' individual projects. By contrast, group meetings in the college would be for reflection on the whole process and sharing of individual projects. She found this differentiation and description helpful. She asked about Pearl's interviews and I explained that we thought it would be too rushed to have them today and that we'd prefer to write to members of staff to explain clearly the purpose of the interviews first. She welcomed this. We talked about the next group meeting which we wanted to hold as a dialogue group. I targeted a date and she said she couldn't come then but on reflection, she decided it would be a good thing for her not to be present. We agreed a time when she couldn't be there. She wanted to know why we needed to have the two groups together for the workshop, and ended by saying that she wasn't opposed in principle to getting together again, though she was still shocked about the way they work. On the subject of the next workshop, it seemed as if it would be too soon to hold it on 21 April, and that it might be appropriate to postpone it." [Research Journal entry]

This represented the point of transition towards a very fruitful and engaged relationship between the two organizations for the duration of the project.

The Individual Sessions

Each participant at ACC had an individual meeting with Andy during March.

- **Ann:** She hadn't done a lot of work on her project since the last meeting because of work pressure. She had six students at the Burlington Industries Workplace Literacy Project that she wanted to interview though she thought she might have to change her sample as one might be losing her job. Another student had moved on to a curriculum course at ACC. We discussed these students and agreed that it might be useful to include them in the sample. Part of her problem was when to interview; Linda had said she could do it in class time as this was pertinent information for the grant. It was, however, a hectic time and doing it in class time could disrupt her work, but it would also be difficult to get together at other times because the students would then be working. Ann already interviews all the students every quarter. The project secretary will transcribe the tapes and she was going to practice taping interviews with her. She seemed to have thought through all aspects of doing the work. She found the session helpful in confirming what she was planning to do, as well as providing some technical input. She felt ready to start and had clearly taken control of her project.

- **Bridget** had moved on from wanting to know what people thought to questions directly about her curriculum; in particular, how do you prepare a participatory curriculum, how do you make it more participatory. We talked about her curriculum at length and found that she kept getting stuck on the issue of whether a particular item, based on workplace materials, was of any relevance to the student's outside life. We discussed the need for her to find a way to stand outside her work in order to look at it with detachment, and agreed that keeping a journal of the process she was engaged in would be a realistic approach. She was happy with this and much happier with the new focus for her research. She would create a journal for the period March to May and then use June to August for data analysis.

- **Marion:** She has been at ACC for more than two years and we discussed the significance of this and the desirability of including in her sample people who had been there a range of lengths of times. She planned to hold two focus groups. She was planning to hold the focus groups in April and planned to transcribe the interviews herself. Andy advised against doing this. She was unsure about people's willingness to be interviewed as there is some resistance among staff to attending meetings, even if they are being paid.

- **Ray:** He rehearsed a strategy involving distributing a questionnaire to all staff, then holding a focus group, and then observing classes using video. Andy suggested he do it in reverse order because of the greater importance of the observations. This session represented a struggle as Ray had a strong commitment to his plan while Andy thought it wouldn't work, not least because Ray wouldn't get to the really useful data before the end of the project. At a second meeting a week later, Michelle and John joined Ray to plan the video sessions. John has previous experience making video films and had agreed to do the filming for Ray and Michelle.

- **John** did not have an individual meeting at this time but at the second meeting with Ray and Michelle said that he was moving ahead with his project, and had already conducted some interviews.

- **Pete:** He had talked to several students and four had agreed to be interviewed. He was concerned about his questions which were sequential, each leading to the next, creating a closed system of questioning. Andy suggested that he create a separate checklist of things he wanted to know, a list of core questions, then a list of prompts, and that he start with one large open question about their experience. This represented a change of focus since he had also been intending to ask only about negative experiences. He hadn't thought about transcribing the interviews nor had he thought about a tape recorder. He would try to interview one person a week through April and mid-May.

- **Angela** did not have an individual meeting as she had started her maternity leave.

These sessions provided the first indications that individual projects were moving forward as planned. They had a clear theme of the researchers defining their issues and preferred strategies; seeking validation from Andy, often for work that was already in process; and asking for help in instances where the researcher was not clear about how to proceed.

The individual meetings continued on a regular basis throughout the project more or less on the pattern established during this period, although they changed in character as participants began writing. Two participants did not have individual sessions, and these two persons had the least contact with the Literacy South team generally. However, that seemed to have no effect on outcomes; one of these persons was the first to finish her project and the other never completed his. It more probably reflects preferred style of work and levels of comfort with the project or project personnel.

Linda's Project

At the first meeting with Linda, part of the time was spent sorting out the budget and the letter of agreement between Literacy South and ACC. Her own project was then discussed, and she made it clear that she was not interested in keeping a journal:

> "We talked about her research. She said Hanna's a journal person, she is not. She had been talking to Ann; they were both so busy doing that they did not want to redo the work by writing about it.
>
> We talked around it and got to the stage where I suggested if we were having fortnightly meetings to talk about the project, that was data; we could record the sessions, and she could later analyze them. She jumped at this and offered to transcribe the sessions. I will supply the recorders for the next meeting." [Research Journal entry]

Linda's project, therefore, emerged from the meetings to monitor progress.

The Dialogue Group

At the February workshop, the group had been asked for nominations of people to plan future events with the Literacy South staff. Bridget and Marion were nominated and they were subsequently involved in planning for the dialogue groups. They met with Andy on March 11:

> We talked about the next sequence of meetings and agreed that a dialogue group could be held on April 2 in the afternoon. They liked the idea of them facilitating in pairs, so that each would have the opportunity but in a supported environment. Bridget said that she was happy to talk at the drop of a hat but many of the staff would get edgy being asked to start talking again about process. We agreed that the session would have three elements: an introduction to the session and a discussion about the types of meetings to be held and a time frame for the rest of the of the project; a core time when everybody would be asked to share their project; a time to consider the sharing of facilitation for the rest of the project.
>
> Marion would send out a memo about these meetings but they agreed that she would talk to everybody as well since they did not read memos well; although she thought my memo was clear, she had had people asking what it was for." [Research Journal entry]

At a subsequent individual meeting, one of the staff members shared that Linda is not comfortable with the staff meeting separately from her. The dialogue groups, therefore, were a cause of some anxiety for everyone involved.

The dialogue group was held as planned and six ACC staff were present (Pete, Angela, Ann, Bridget, Marion, Michelle). Bridget and Marion talked about why they should take responsibility for facilitating the meeting, but this did not seem to be a major concern for anyone else.

The agenda's main focus was each participant's report on his or her progress so far. Each person introduced his or her work and the discussion then covered a wide range of topics, including practical research issues. The meeting showed that the participants were using each other as sources of knowledge about research. They also were offering critiques of issues arising from each other's work. The discussions included:

- Interviewing

  Techniques being used to ask questions in their interviews.

  Numbers of people to be interviewed.

  Choice of their interview sample.

  Techniques of managing their interviews.

  Length of interviews.

  Logistics of conducting interviews, in and out of class time.

Tapes, taping and transcribing.

- Timing of their projects, when they needed to be complete.
- Time the work was taking.
- Relationship of their research to their work.
- Overall research design and process, including a discussion of the involvement of the students in reviewing video tapes of their class.
- The budget and costs of the research.

The meeting showed that some had started data collection and that others were poised to start. Everybody had made some progress. The meeting also showed that the ACC participants had genuinely made the work their own, that they were taking responsibility for conceptualizing it and making it happen. This responded to Literacy South's earlier anxiety about control and ownership of the process.

Work at PPP

Contact with PPP during this period was much sparser. On February 9, Andy and Pearl met the staff at Kannapolis to review some of their data and to think about how they might subsequently analyze it. There was a hiatus in the middle of the meeting. Some personal issues had arisen for one of the staff members, and Andy and Pearl had to leave for an hour while they sorted it out.

"The final outcome of the meeting was that they agreed that:

- Liz and co would tape a complete set of material including the Randall Kenan session and we would then analyze what was happening;

- Billy would record what was happening until the end of April, on tape, and would ask interviewers to record what was happening in their door to door calls;

- Cheryl would record her meetings preparing for their health meeting." [Research Journal entry]

At the joint workshop in February it seemed as if the PPP participants were not at all clear about what they were doing. This was out of character; it may have happened because of the dynamics of the day. Because of the difficulty of meeting regularly, Andy wrote to PPP after the workshop, to

clarify what they were doing. Part of this letter, dealing with their research topics, was reproduced in Chapter 4. The rest is reproduced below (as **Figure 6** and **Figure 7**) as it provides the most succinct account of this meeting:

"First we watched a video of a community meeting at Midway. Here are some of the issues that came out:

- A lot of talk was happening; many people were talking who had not talked at earlier meetings; the amount of interchange was high.
- It was not possible to tell easily who was talking from the video, though Billy could tell, having been there.
- Billy also reported that another meeting had happened spontaneously; a steering group meeting had been in progress and people had just drifted in because they wanted to know what was happening.
- In other words, his knowledge and observation of the event was as important as the recording.

We agreed that two things should be done:

- The people who were going door to door to ask people in Midway about what had been happening in the work would if possible record their conversations. The tapes would be reviewed by PPP staff; the interviewers and the Steering Committee would also be invited to comment on the tapes. These discussions would in turn be taped.
- Billy would keep a daily record of what was going on, who was talking to who, what events took place. He could do this with a tape recorder if he didn't want to write. This should be done for a period (we said until the end of April) to allow enough activity to have taken place.

We had an interesting discussion about who was acceptable to the community and could conduct interviews. Billy felt he could not, even though he was well accepted in the community, but this wasn't just about race; Marion was not acceptable, even though she is a black woman, because of her accent and clothes. The interviewers would therefore be local residents in Midway who were involved in the campaign, though they could not be paid for this piece of work.

We did not identify what we would be trying to find out from this material but some of the questions that were left on the table included:

- who is involved in different events and activities;
- who talks;
- what they say;
- how they say it;
- who are the leaders, how this is expressed;
- where this all happens.

Then we listened to some tapes of material to do with the study group. One involved Liz, Roni and Alice planning a session and another was an excerpt from a study group session.

I am less clear about what we agreed from listening to these tapes.

• There was some good coverage of the interactions taking place and of what you would be concerned with in the study group session. From the piece I heard, there seemed to be a greater emphasis on your concerns rather than on how you would deal with them, but we didn't listen to the whole tape, so that may be an incomplete impression.
• There was some material on how people deal with the issue of bad language and swearing.

We agreed that:

• Recordings would be made of all the study group sessions involving Randall Kenan's book, including the session when he visited and the following session in case people came back to it, since you didn't think you would continue working on this material after his visit.

Again, we did not identify what we would be trying to find out from this material and the session ended before we had a chance to formulate questions that we would want to ask.

We did not ask Liz and Roni to keep a journal or log though that would probably have been helpful.

I would be pleased to have your comments and additions to this account of what has happened so far. I will ask Pearl to review the account as well.

A next step in formulating the research might be to clarify what we are trying to ask when we look at all this material, what exactly we are trying to find out about your work.

I would like to emphasize that there is no right and wrong answer in all this; this is just my interpretation. We are all struggling to find a way to do this piece of work in a way that makes sense as a piece of research and that struggle is part of what doing research is about." [Letter, February 23, 1993]

Figure 6: Excerpt from letter to PPP , February

A separate issue was improving communication in view of the difficulty of having meetings. This was addressed in the third part of the letter

At a meeting with Roni, Liz, and Billy at Southern Pines, on March 17, they agreed to the research method that had been outlined in the letter, and agreed to a cut off point for data collection of May 15. They also agreed to commit to the dialogue journal.

At a separate meeting in Durham on March 26, Roni and Andy discussed the PPP budget. Roni also provided verbal feedback on the workshop with ACC, since they had not yet provided any written feedback.

This period of work with PPP seemed to suggest that they had started data collection and made decisions about the rest of the data to be collected. They had also committed to a system of communication that would facilitate the continuing development of thinking about the work.

"Part of our concern at this stage of the work is to find a format for working with you over the rest of the project which works within everybody's time constraints, and which also takes the work forward in a way which is of maximum benefit to you. We are having to do this in a tight time frame.

One way to do this would be through a dialogue journal, a journal which everybody contributes to; it is much like a conversation, between all of us, in writing, over a period of time, but where everything everyone has said is still available to refer back to. I would like to suggest that the piece above could be the first entry in such a journal; each of your responses would then be the next entry.

It might work like this. If you each write your response to this note at the end of the piece (below - it doesn't need to be typed), then pass it to the next person who should do the same. When you have all written a response, please return the whole document and we will reply to you in turn. The material will be kept together as we add to it, though it might be sensible for a copy of the whole journal to be kept at PPP and Literacy South so that if it gets lost, we still have a record. It would be helpful for one person at PPP to take responsibility for ensuring that it is circulating and being returned.

If this is going to be too time consuming, you could each send me just your own reply, and we will then combine them into the one journal so that everybody's contribution is available to the whole group.

The material will of course be confidential to the people who have written it, that is, the staff at PPP and at Literacy South. All Literacy South staff will be invited to read the material but they will in turn be expected to make a contribution to the dialogue." [Letter, February 23, 1993]

Figure 7: Excerpt from letter to PPP, February

Issues Arising

The Need for a Communication Channel

At ACC, Marion emerged as someone who could act as a channel of communication. This subsequently proved important as it meant there was an effective and reliable person to facilitate communication back and forth, who was neither a member of the ACC management nor from Literacy South. Had such a person not existed, subsequent communication would

have been more difficult and control issues would continue to have been associated with communication.

Confidentiality

At ACC, each person was conducting a separate piece of work. Some of these were potentially sensitive since they provided a critique of different areas of the department's work, and of the work of some individuals. However, there was considerable overlapping of staff in focus groups, as subjects of interviews, and in video taped classroom sessions. Additionally, many of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a secretary who was an instructor in one of the classes being videotaped. These overlaps mean that confidentiality in the data could not be easily maintained. This did not seem to be an issue for most staff, though some sensitivities showed themselves later in the work.

Research Model

During this period we began to understand that practitioners were creating a research model that differed from the one offered by Literacy South:

> "There are different phases beginning to become apparent in this project which are not the same as the phases which we have used for delineating the research process itself. The current one at ACC seems to be about <u>becoming researchers</u>. The phase is not the same for Linda as for everybody else as for her it is about another project in the College, and how she relates to that project, in particular, a project where she does not have the control." [Research Journal entry.]

Source Documents for the Chapter:

"Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development": <u>Letter</u> from Literacy South to the staff at ACC, March 3, 1993 (quoted above).

CHAPTER 7

COLLECTING THE DATA

Timeline: April to July, 1993

This phase shows a slightly different pattern of activity involving individual meetings with some people, no contact with others, and much more telephone communication. Several participants at both sites moved from data collection to analysis and, by July, planning for data analysis was well under way.

Thursday, 1 April: Meeting with Linda.
Tuesday, 20 April: Meeting with Linda.
Monday, 3 May: Phone call with Ray about viewing their tapes and about their first focus groups.
Phone call with Roni.
Tuesday, 4 May: Meeting with Linda.
Friday, 14 May: ACC Dialogue Group 2.
Received feedback from PPP for the dialogue journal.
Tuesday, 18 May: Phone call with Liz.
Wednesday, 19 May: Individual meeting, Angela.
Friday, 21 May: Meeting Ray and Michelle.
Friday, 4 June: Individual meeting, Marion.
Thursday, 10 June: Meeting Marion and Bridget to plan next ACC workshop.
Tuesday, 15 June: Meeting Linda.
Monday, 21 June: Phone call with Cheryl.
Thursday, 24 June: Meeting PPP, Kannapolis, to plan for data analysis workshop.
Thursday 1 July: ACC workshop 2. [Research Journal entries]

The differences in the ACC and PPP teams' processes became more pronounced during this period. The second ACC dialogue group convened midway through the period and a workshop with ACC staff was held at the end of the period. PPP, on the other hand, was getting tapes transcribed and waiting for a data analysis workshop later.

Literacy South staff were trying to understand what was happening and, in some cases, worrying about whether anything was happening.

Work at ACC

From this point, it is easier to tell individual stories rather than trying to group all the activities around the common theme of data collection.

Linda's Story

Linda and Andy met four times for progress meetings which were taped to provide documentation about the experience of conducting practitioner research at ACC. In each case, the meetings were intended to cover current issues, progress of the project, and issues that might provide a focus for discussion and insight into the project. A number of ideas about the process of conducting research emerged in these meetings, often related to issues that Linda had to deal with in the course of her other work.

> • In the first meeting, an RFP from the NC Department of Community Colleges acted as a focus for the discussion. This was directed to literacy teachers, inviting them to apply for mini-grants to conduct small pieces of research. Three ACC teachers had applied, all of them participants in this project, and all wanting to pursue issues that they were currently working on.
>
> This discussion set the tone for subsequent discussions around the theme of the research content of the department's work, and of each person's individual role.
>
> • In the meeting on May 4, the question was posed about why staff engage in research, why they volunteered for the project. In the course of this discussion, the attitude of the College also became an issue.
>
> • The meeting of June 15 focused on the question of what skills Linda would like the staff to develop through participation in the project. The answers contributed to the emerging notion that future research activity in the department should be pursued as a form of staff development.
>
> There was a short discussion of administrative items at the end of this session.
>
> • The meeting on July 7 included discussion of the workshop on July 1, and about how people's progress could be monitored without interfering in their research.

The meetings achieved their aim of helping with the progress of the overall project even though individual cases and administrative matters featured relatively little. They also provided an opportunity for Linda to explore how

practitioner research could be used for staff development in her own department.

Angela

Andy met with Angela once during this period. She had already collected a large amount of data and did not know what to do with it next. She had collected half a dozen sets of data from four people including pre and post test scores, quarterly contracts, observations, interviews, a questionnaire and a learning styles inventory.

Because of her uncertainty about what to do next, Angela was thinking about collecting still more data. Andy suggested that she should think about making sense of the data she had instead. Her sample included two older people (in their 60s) and two younger people (20s/30s); the similarities and differences in their experience of schooling could be interesting. Angela agreed to use her data to write a profile of her four subjects that she would share with Andy.

Ray and Michelle

Ray and Michelle had also moved quickly into their initial data collection. They had videotaped two classes at Burlington Industries and at one of the College campuses. They viewed the tapes and decided which sections should be included in an edited version to play back to focus groups.

Originally they planned to have two staff focus groups as they thought they did not have enough money to cover the cost of student focus groups as well. After their first staff focus group they asked for a meeting with Andy. They were worried that Ray might have dominated the group, inhibiting the flow of discussion. Ray thought this was because he intervened too early when the participants did not talk; Michelle thought it was because the participants were having difficulty separating Ray's facilitating role from his role as a manager. In either case, they experienced this focus group as being as difficult as "plowing with mules".

They decided that Ray should not come to the second focus group. It would be difficult for one person to facilitate the group, record it and handle

the video tape, so they decided to ask Marion to help Michelle since Marion had been at the first group. Ray and Michelle spent a lot of time discussing the mechanics of the interactions they were setting up, continually reflecting about what they were doing.

Marion

Marion had one meeting with Andy; she did not need any help but wanted an opportunity to reflect on what she was doing and to get some affirmation of her direction.

Others

Three participants, Pete, John and Ann, did not have individual meetings during this phase. Ann and Pete attended the first dialogue group meeting on April 16 and all three attended the dialogue group meeting on May 14, so they were in touch with Literacy South in a group setting and were not pursued or pressured into having individual meetings.

The Dialogue Group

A second dialogue group meeting was held on May 14, facilitated by Marion and Ann. Bridget and Marion had facilitated the first dialogue group; Marion teamed with Ann to facilitate the second group; Ann would in turn pair with another participant for the third. This pattern provided support to participants who felt nervous about the role, and was expected to provide most participants with an opportunity to facilitate a session before the project ended.

Marion and Ann used a range of techniques in facilitating this meeting:

- They offered help.
- They asked questions.
- They circulated extracts from the reports written in the previous year's Literacy South practitioner research project.

At this meeting, the participants again took the opportunity to ask each other about issues in their research, or that they were struggling with or expecting to encounter. The issues this time included:

- Time - to fit in interviews with their work and with their subjects' schedules.
- Related to time, the progress of their research and how this compared to their original planning schedules.
- How to conduct interviews - in groups or individually.
- How much data to collect, whether they had too much or too little.
- Taping, getting hold of equipment, getting interviews taped adequately.
- Thinking out what they were doing, whether it was making sense.
- Selecting adequately representative samples.
- Getting subjects to talk freely in interviews. This was especially the case when teachers were watching videos of their colleagues' teaching: they seemed very reluctant to comment on their colleagues' work.
- Time and schedules in relation to the next workshop and the next dialogue group meeting.

A quotation from one of the participants catches their mood and concerns at this point:

> "I was just looking back at the time frame that I had said and I said all the information would be together by the end of May. I doubt that that will happen. I guess I'm about half way through and it may be that I can finish with the interviews. Again, I'm having the same problem that everybody ... It's just finding the time to do the interviews. And the only reason I'm half way through is because Angela rescued me and helped out with some of the interviews. But even though I have the students right here in the class, there are so much other things that are going on, it's hard to take 30 minutes to an hour out of my class period to take one person aside to interview. I'm just not real sure how I'm going to handle that.
>
> It's just real hard to do that. And if they come back when they get off of work, well then I have other classes going on then, so I'm not free at that time neither. So - I'm not real sure what the solution is, and I do think that if you know, push comes to shove I have done 5 interviews and I could possibly work on that. I've also had to change my original list of people that I was going to interview, simply again because of time frame, being able to set up the interviews. So that's changed a little bit. I don't know that that will change the outcome of the project. And I think, all of this we will probably work around and work out something. My major concern is the next thing on my list, now what am I supposed to do, once I get this information, then what do we do, that's I think the thing that concerns me the most at this particular..."

By the end of the meeting, the focus had moved from data collection to analysis, even though they were not all individually ready to begin their analysis.

This dialogue group represented a shift in attitude towards the Project:

> "The unease of ownership has gone. We've moved on to an owned by practitioners model." [Research Journal entry]

This was reinforced by Marion and Bridget participating in planning the second workshop.

Work at PPP

Much of this period involved attempts at communication with PPP with increasing feelings of unease about whether the process was working. This was ameliorated by receiving feedback from PPP through the dialogue journal in the middle of May.

> "**From:** Billy, PPP **Date:** 4/26/93
>
> The recording of conversation in Midway and between Midway and PPP has gotten off to a slow start because of not having tape recorders for the door to door piece - it has become more clear to me that there is a lack of communication between members of the Midway community which makes leadership development very difficult. I have called several of the Midway steering committee members as part of my normal communication with community but have not seen much result reflected in turn-out at meetings and trainings - this lends me to believe there is some community barrier to individuals taking on leadership roles in the community - it should be remembered that although we have been working longer in Midway than in any other community - the Midway steering committee is only several (six) months old. - it should also be noted that, Mrs ..., who has been the sole leadership in Midway for a dozen years is not very eager to turn that leadership over to younger less experienced people. Several events have happened in Midway that should be noted. 3/20 was Midway Day which had well over 150 people attending and was a great success. Midway continues to hold monthly steering committee meetings and monthly community meetings although attendance at these meetings has become low - Steve feels that since the CDBG program is coming to a close people are losing interest.
>
> **From:** Liz, PPP **Date:** 4/30/93
>
> The Study Group has gotten off to a good start on Economic Development and Free Trade. To date the sessions I'd highlight in this new program are (a) 3/16, when we talked about "What is Economic Development?" and came up with starting course of action [(1) learn more (2) create a brochure to get information out to others and increase our numbers and (3) letters to Senate/Congress] and (b) 4/1, when we explored how a huge loss of jobs (as when a plant closes) affects a town/community/our lives.
>
> 5/4 We planned an all-day workshop to begin developing a brochure on Free Trade/Economic Development to bring together the Kannapolis Study Group with ... other Moore County folks. It had to be postponed due to too many

schedule conflicts with the date set (of participants). Cheryl and I came up with the start of a great role play for learning about Free Trade. We're looking forward to using it when we reschedule the workshop. After several Study Group meetings on economic development, we all (Cheryl and myself as facilitators included, or especially!) got a little overwhelmed at the whole complicated mess of NAFTA and Free Trade, so we're stepping back for a moment on that piece. Today in Study Group we talked about what were our favorite study group meetings, why they were good, and what makes a good meeting. It went very well. Cheryl and I planned it from a discussion she and I had about our strong concerns that folk in our Kannapolis membership aren't having true ownership of our organization. Are we walking our talk about empowerment-organizing; are we truly helping folk "Find Their Voice"? It feels like we need to step back for just a moment and evaluate that and to maybe proceed differently. The Literacy South Participatory Learning Model should be applied in more of our general organizing."

In both pieces, there was a clear dominance of an organizer's perspective on the work over a researcher's concern with data collection. This reflects, in stronger form, the experience at ACC where job role strongly determined several people's focus and perspective. It still left unanswered the role of research at PPP, but their attempt to find ways to engage with their experience was evident.

Pearl and Andy were due to visit PPP on May 18 but received a phone call just before they were due to leave, postponing the meeting. Communications with PPP featured as a main issue in several of the update meetings between Hanna, Andy and Pearl. The meeting at Kannapolis was eventually held on June 24. It was used to plan for a two day data analysis workshop to be held in July. Andy's journal entry provides an account of the meeting.

"We joined them for the first part of their program committee meeting. We dealt with our stuff first, which took about 45 minutes, and then sat through the rest of their meeting which didn't really concern us.

We went straight into the detail of our workshop on 15/16 July. They were all preoccupied with who would bring what supplies and what meal arrangements we would have. I was the one who had to insert some sense of program and pre-workshop preparation. I had some difficulty getting them to say what they had got by way of taped material and what had been transcribed but we ended up with a reasonable list which should provide enough material to work on. Liz is handling the transcription and she seemed to have made a good decision in choosing what to transcribe; not just the high moments but a range of moments. We agreed that she would make two copies of each and circulate them prior to the workshop so everyone could read and make notes. I asked them not to mark them as it would direct each others reading. Everyone would read some, not all, and would be looking for patterns and issues. We will spend

> the first part of the workshop sharing and agreeing what themes we might look for in more depth. The second part would then be spent in small groups analyzing some pieces in more detail. We didn't plan what to do then, but we did agree that it would be good to try and write up some of the analysis while we were there. We will therefore need computer.
>
> They were totally committed to the task but it still seemed to be on the fringes of their work.... [This meeting] reaffirmed the time pressures that they all work under. They have no free time before the end of August, and in looking at their calendars, didn't raise the question of where they would fit in extra work on the NIL project after the workshop if it were needed." [Research Journal entry]

PPP also was making the transition between collecting and analyzing data. Because one person was handling the transcribing, and because the group focused on formally agreed meeting times to engage in the work, several people had little practical role in the research at this stage. PPP was still involved, because they had made a commitment; it was less clear that they had a strong sense of what they were trying to achieve through this research project. Continued participation depended on the energy and commitment of individuals at PPP and different people possessed this energy at different times. However, because of the small number of people involved, and because they were working on a team project, the absence of one or two participants could slow the work considerably.

Issues Arising

Research Paradigm Under Pressure

It becomes increasingly evident during this phase that the research model based on a series of sequential steps, while still remaining valid, was not the dominant way that participants viewed their projects. People were more concerned with their work lives, and the research had to fit into that dominant reality.

Research Models

The quantitative approach to research continued to dominate as a perspective through which participants' tried to understand what they were doing.

Continuing Uncertainty

Uncertainty continued to be characteristic of this phase as people found themselves unsure about what to do with their data. Several who had not planned their initial questions found themselves dealing with extra uncertainty. In this style of work there is an opportunity to adjust strategy while work is in progress. This seems to happen more easily if there is sharing and reflection on the process, but everybody was not equally comfortable with sharing.

CHAPTER 8

ANALYZING DATA AND WRITING REPORTS

Timeline: July to October, 1993

This is a very busy time in the life of the Project. The sites' pace and style of work also diverge widely. To make it easier to handle this divergence, the two sites are treated separately in this Chapter.

The research activities - data analysis and writing - are treated together as the records of the period show that many participants combined their analysis and writing. The analysis of qualitative data frequently involves writing as much as any other activity: writing is a tool used in the process of analysis just as statistics are a tool used in other styles of research. Additionally, many of the participants did not make a clear distinction between the writing involved in analysis and the writing involved in preparing a report.

Work at ACC

The period at ACC starts with the workshop on July 1 focusing on data analysis and ends at a workshop on October 1 to present the research and its outcomes to other literacy staff at ACC. The individual participants differed both in the speed at which they worked and in the amount of interaction they wanted with Literacy South staff during their analysis and writing.

Workshop 2: July 1

At the February workshop, Marion and Bridget had been nominated to meet with Andy and Hanna on June 10 to plan the program. This workshop focused on data analysis, a topic which had been identified by the participants at an earlier dialogue group and at the workshop in February. Eight participants were present for the workshop, with Pete absent.

Thursday, 1 July: Workshop - data analysis.

Wednesday, 7 July: Sent reading list to ACC.

Thursday, 8 July: Phone call asking for help from Ray and Michelle.

Monday, 12 July: Meeting, Ray and Michelle.

Wednesday, 14 July: Meeting, Linda.

Friday, 22 July: ACC dialogue group. Linda attended.
Interview with Ray to help with their project.

Tuesday, 27 July: Interview with Michelle to help with their project.
Ray and Michelle focus group at Central Carolina Community College.
Notes about writing up sent to ACC.

Monday, 9 August: Meeting with Bridget about analysis.
Meeting with Linda.
Letter to ACC staff about workshop; personal note to Pete.

Friday, 20 August: Individual meeting, Linda.

Sunday, 22 August: Phone call from Pete.

Tuesday, 24 August: ACC Workshop - writing.

Tuesday, 7 September: Individual meeting, Pete.

Thursday, 9 September: Individual meeting: Linda.

Tuesday, 14 September: ACC dialogue group.

Tuesday, 21 September: Individual meeting Pete - he's started writing.
ACC dialogue group.
Individual meeting Marion.
Individual meeting Bridget.

Thursday, 23 September: Call from Bridget about progress.

Friday, 24 September: Bridget delivered her first pages of writing.

Monday, 27 September: Call to Bridget to provide feedback.

Tuesday, 28 September: Individual meeting Pete.
Individual meeting Ann.
Individual meeting Bridget.
Individual meeting with Marion postponed.

Thursday, 30 September: Bridget delivered draft report.
Phoned Bridget to provide feedback.
Individual meeting with Marion postponed.
Meeting with Bridget about her draft report.

Friday, 1 October: Workshop to report work. One page summaries of reports produced.
Received Ann's and Angela's projects. [Research Journal entries]

The workshop was facilitated by Marion and Bridget with Hanna and Andy providing technical support. The program focused on:

- Updating and sharing individual progress.
- Exploring the meanings of data analysis, partly through a hands-on analysis of some data from another study.
- Planning each participant's step for conducting analysis.
- Exploring the types of reporting that would be appropriate for each person's project.

The evaluations show that the workshop was well received. Most of the discussion in the evaluations focused on the content, in particular the focus on analysis:

> "The knowledge that was shared; there was a good sharing of ideas and a sense that we were moving forward, real teamwork.
>
> It was good to do specific data analysis, both using the sample data and getting specific about what we were going to do with our own. I felt there was a good level of participation and it seemed like people felt pretty good about what they were getting out of the workshop.
>
> Very informative - gave me some guidelines to go by and confirmed my assumptions/suspicions on how to go about analysis.
>
> The actual analysis of text from [another] study. Finding themes and evaluating comments was helpful in seeing how much may be evident in our interviewing. I have a much clearer understanding of approaches to analysis." [Comments from evaluation forms]

Some issues about the impact of the research were also raised for the first time, including the issue of how to report findings that might be critical of some aspect of the department's work:

> "How to handle comments (made in interviews) re: dissatisfaction with certain administrative personalities and policies.... [Some comments may] be inflammatory yet I don't want to censor the information I've received." [Comment from evaluation forms]

Another, was about the implications for the department's work in the future;

> " How we might use this research from the total group to enhance the program here at ACC. We need to have a vehicle to insure that we are able to access all of each other's research. How can we continue the process after the grant and not lose our momentum. How can we make this research user friendly and apply it to our total program." [Comment from evaluation forms]

Literacy South Interventions

We circulated a reading list on July 7. We did not do this earlier, since we had been concerned that a reading list might compromise the participants' ownership of the Project and their autonomy in defining their research projects. It also might have promoted an academic approach to research. Additionally, it was not clear what could have gone into a reading list early in the Project. Instead, references were suggested to individuals as issues arose in their work, and examples of practitioner research from the previous year's project was made available for those interested.

The reading list was circulated at this point at the request of the participants and contained some contextual material on practitioner research and some material on adult literacy that was relevant to several of the participants. These included a monograph and literature review that Hanna had recently completed for ERIC. This, and several of the other items, were supplied to all the participants, with the reading list (See **figure 8**).

The complete reading list is contained at the end of this Report as Appendix 3.

Dialogue Group: July 23

This was facilitated by Michelle and Marion. Pete, John and Ann were not present but Linda started attending the group meetings from this date.

The participants were firmly in control of the process by this time and were joking about the notion of the facilitator role (relabeling it "Information Retrieval Technician" instead of Facilitator on their agenda). Linda's presence did not seem to inhibit discussion.

The agenda was divided between sharing progress on their projects and Bridget sharing extracts from her journal. The main issues raised were:

- **Delays** in getting tasks completed, partly due to extraneous circumstances at the college.
- **Data analysis** so far, including the large amount of data they had to analyze.
- **Transcribing**. Marion had decided to do her own and was pleased to have done so:

> "I think the main problem that I thought I would encounter was the transcription and when I decided to do it myself and I'm kind of glad I did,

because it just gave me another chance to listen to what was said in the groups ... when I was doing the word processing. So I'm kind of glad I decided to do that." [Dialogue Group]

- **The audience** for their work, in particular for their reports: they agreed that the staff would be their main audience and that they would report both orally and in writing.

- **The redefinition of methods** that some had engaged in as a result of their experience. Michelle shared their decision to go outside the College to collect extra data.

> "Michelle: "We are doing another focus group in Siler City on Tuesday. After talking with Andy it was obvious that we needed somebody from outside the school to view the videotapes, because it seemed to be hard for our instructors to be critical of our instructors on the videotape. So we're going to get the group in Siler City to view it and do another focus group.
>
> Ray: ... The neat thing about this that I think is going to be really good is that not only is this going to give us a more objective view but Karen Allen who will be leading this group has done this kind of a similar project last year. And so they've already wrestled with some of the stuff and they will have at least people who will really be able to be honest with us and tell us exactly how they view this thing. So, the fact that our instructors were going to have a really hard time with being objective with the viewing of fellow instructors, and responding to it ... it's going to be interesting to see what we get from that." [Dialogue Group]

Additionally, Linda formally raised the issue of where this work might go next, an outcome of her own project.

> "The question that I had for you all is where do we go from here. In other words, once we have completed this project, what is it that we want done.... for example, do we want to continue on a yearly basis to have some sort of money available to instructors to do this? Or do we want to maybe plan that if every, once every year at a conference, whoever has done research will present, or what is it that we want to see come out of this. I mean most of you volunteered not knowing exactly what all this meant. And now that you know, you may never want to get up here. But I think it's been a good experience for most of you. At some level, either in the interaction with other people or what you actually learned, or dealing with these people, I don't now, whatever. But I'd really like some input on that, and some discussion." [Dialogue Group]

Ray suggested that in future, all staff development should be based on an inquiry model.

Workshop 3: August 24

The third ACC workshop ran from 8:30 am to midday on August 24. Angela and John were due to facilitate the workshop but John didn't arrive until late in the morning so Angela facilitated the workshop by herself. As

several other people were also missing or late, the workshop was very informal.

Introduction

This reading list describes a few publications that may contribute to your work. It is organized in two sections:

- Items about adult literacy which provide context for this work or which might relate to some of your research pieces.
- Items about practitioner research, some of which are not drawn from the adult literacy field but which are still interesting.

It is not suggested that you read the whole list but that you use it as a menu from which to select pieces that might be relevant to what you are doing or thinking about, and as a starting point to pursue issues you want to read about more extensively.

It might be useful at future meetings also to add items which you have read which you think might be of interest to colleagues working on the project.

Key items are marked with an asterisk (*) and a copy is attached. Copies of all the other pieces are available on request: please contact Pearl, Jonathan or Andy at Literacy South. [Introduction to Reading List]

Figure 8: Introduction to Reading List

The focus of the workshop was on writing. It again built on the participants' progress and their current issues. Themes included the importance of audience, the use of drafts, the value of outlines, and strategies to overcome writing blocks.

The workshop was used to punctuate the participants' work and even to create some pressure for them, by asking them to bring some of their draft writing, at the suggestion of the participants in the planning team:

> "The workshop will focus on writing up your research. The program assumes that everyone will have produced something by this stage. **Please bring your draft report with you.** The whole session is planned to help you with your draft." [Extract from letter informing participants of the workshop]

Since they were being asked to engage in writing ahead of the workshop on that topic, some notes about report writing were circulated with the agenda. These were referred to frequently by the participants as they worked through the final stages of the project.

Dialogue Group: September 14

Michelle was missing for this meeting and John arrived near the end; Angela facilitated for John. The group was by now so relaxed about its processes that they were able to agree on an agenda there and then. Most of the time was spent sharing where they were with their writing. They were engaged in:

- **Narrowing** their scope in order to be able to finish.
- **Clarifying** their ideas through their writing.
- **Focusing** on the outcomes of their research through having to write them down.
- **Outlining topics** for writing.
- **Managing their time** for writing and dealing with practical obstacles like computer time and typing capacity.
- **Completing** their writing.
- **Handling the difficulty** of writing.

They discussed the pending workshop on October 1, when they would be presenting their findings, and agreed that they would prepare one-page synopses of their reports for this event. Typing these synopses was discussed - Linda's secretary, who had been doing much of the typing, was on sick leave. Marion was volunteered to take responsibility for organizing the work, which meant doing much of the typing herself. Her role as the link with Literacy South expanded dramatically at this point and she took on the role of transcribing, typing and production for several of her colleagues.

Marion and Andy volunteered to put together some guidelines for the preparation of synopses, for the following week's dialogue group.

SOME BRIEF NOTES ON REPORT WRITING

Although the next workshop is about writing up research, we are also asking you to bring your draft report with you so that we can work on it together. We thought it would be helpful therefore, to let you have a few notes on what we see as important in a report of this type of work.

There are broadly five issues that should be addressed:

1. What were you trying to learn about?
2. What did you do?
3. What do you think you found out?
4. What does this mean?
5. Where do you go from here?

Each of these questions might provide the basis of a chapter or section. On the other hand, you might have so much to say in answering one question that you need several chapters for it.

The biggest pitfall for many people is differentiating between questions 3 & 4:
Question 3 is intended to report what you found in the data, the themes and issues that emerged; it is an account of facts, opinions, issues that you uncovered.
Question 4 is intended to provide your thoughts on what those facts and issues mean, what their significance is, especially in relation to your original question(s).

Clearly, you don't have to follow these headings but they have the advantage of providing a clear and easy way of presenting your material and the work you have done, that other people will understand.

You will probably have more material than you can deal with. Don't worry if you end up not using some of it. And don't forget you can put some of your material in appendices at the end of the report if it gets in the way of your writing.

Figure 9: Notes on Writing

Pearl had been conducting interviews with individual participants, and Angela raised an issue which she had been discussing with Pearl. Angela asked about whether labeling the project in the beginning as "research" had had an intimidating effect on some people. This was discussed for some time. Linda then came back to the question of what the follow up to this Project should be.

The final topic again related to the pending workshop. The group decided to invite colleagues from other community colleges - in particular from the colleges that had been involved with Literacy South in the previous year's practitioner research project.

Dialogue Group: September 21

This meeting represented a winding down of group effort. John and Michelle were not present. Linda came late and she, Ray and Pete all left during the meeting. Andy had to leave for a period soon after the beginning, to sort out replacement recording equipment. There was no clear agenda and nobody took on the facilitation role.

The suggested format for preparing summary reports was shared, discussed at length, and agreed (see **Figure 10**)

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR SUMMARY REPORTS

Title: of your piece of work.

Who: Name and role of the person doing the research.

What: What your research question was, what you were trying to find out, and why this was an issue for you.

How: What methods and approach you used.

Findings: What you found out from the research.

Implications: Do your findings have any implications for the college and its work.

Figure 10: Suggested format for report summary, ACC

Individual Work

Some participants asked for no help from Literacy South during period, while others wanted a lot of support to help them finish. The amount of contact with Literacy South did not relate to how quickly or easily they finished. All of the participants produced a summary report for the October 1 workshop, and all came to the workshop to present their work.

- **Angela** asked for no help with writing. However, she had been involved in all the dialogue groups and workshops, had played a leading role in them, and was clearly involved with the work. At the dialogue group on September 21, she declined to report on her project to the group, saying it would be a surprise. She was the first to hand in her report, at the workshop on October 1.

- **Ann** asked for one individual meeting, just before the last workshop, on September 28. She had completed her report and wanted feedback prior to submitting it. As the work was complete, the discussion was mostly about presentation. Ann also handed in her report at the workshop on October 1.

- **Marion** worked much more slowly. She attended all the group meetings and reported on her work in progress and there was no sense of her being in difficulty. She wanted to meet for individual meetings (and did meet for one on September 21) but there was a high incidence of these being postponed, for a variety of reasons - she was very involved in typing other people's work at this stage. By October 1, her report writing was still in progress.

- **Linda:** Linda's pattern of meetings with Andy continued - they met four times in this period - though the focus moved from discussion about research at ACC to analyzing her data and writing her report. She completed this soon after the October 1 workshop.

  In many ways, she completed her work earlier as her major findings were about the impact of practitioner research among her staff, and her desire to see this style of work continued. She rejoined the other participants in the group meetings from July 22, and part of her involvement in these meetings involved her in feeding back her ideas to the other participants. This sharing of her work with her colleagues became an important part of her reporting.

- **Ray and Michelle** struggled with their material all the way. On July 8, they phoned to ask for a meeting to help them review what they were doing. This meeting with Andy happened on July 12, by which time Andy had read the transcripts of their staff focus groups and had viewed the videos they had used with the focus groups. Two issues came into focus during this discussion:

i) Though Ray and Michelle were talking about definitions of learner centered and participatory literacy, it was not clear that they had defined for themselves how they were using these terms, it was not even clear that they were using the terms in the same way. To help with clarifying their own definitions, Andy agreed to interview each of them briefly about their views on these topics to provide some extra data for them. These interviews happened on July 23 and 27.

ii) The staff at ACC who participated in the two focus groups knew the staff who were in the video tapes being critiqued; during the focus groups, their level of comment was generally uncritical. It was not clear whether this meant that they were happy with the style of work they saw happening, or whether they were unwilling to make comments critical of their colleagues. It was decided that a further focus group with practitioners outside the College was needed to provide a different perspective. Subsequently, this extra focus group was held at Central Carolina Community College, a neighboring college some twenty miles away.

The impact of this extra data collection was considerable, and Ray talked at length about their findings at the dialogue groups in September. They did not however submit their report until later.

- Bridget: Bridget struggled in conducting her analysis and writing her report. She had so much data that it was difficult to know how to conduct some useful analysis.

  Eventually, Bridget decided to analyze the presence and activity in her journal of each of the major actors or group of actors involved in her curriculum development process. This provided a needed focus, but Bridget still had to struggle to accept that the data in her journal was real data.

  She had four face-to-face meetings about her analysis and writing, but needed extra help to facilitate her work. She developed a strategy of setting herself limited targets - for example writing one page about the involvement of company personnel - and then calling Andy to say that it was done. Because of work and family schedules this involved calls outside of regular working hours. They would then share the work and set some more targets. This enabled Bridget to develop a rhythm through which she was able to complete a draft report by the end of September.

  The pattern of communication was slowed by the need to pass sheets of paper back and forth and would have been speeded up by electronic communication. Bridget and Andy did not however have fax facilities at home, and could not get their computers to communicate through modems. Electronic communications should have been established earlier.

- Pete disappeared from view for a while, not attending several group meetings nor asking for individual meetings. When sending out a letter on August 9, about the next workshop, Andy added a personal note inviting Pete to call, which he did soon after.

  They met for an individual meeting early in September. Pete's class had been involved in a number of shift changes, and many of his classes were between 11:00 pm and 2:00 am, making it difficult for him to schedule interviews. He seemed unconfident about his project but set himself some targets and by a subsequent individual meeting on September 21, had started writing. This pattern continued and he finished in mid-October.

- John also was not making progress during this period although he did attend meetings. He did not have any individual meetings and by October 1, though he prepared his synopsis, it was not clear what other progress he had made.

Workshop 4: October 1

The final ACC workshop provided an opportunity for the participants to report their findings to their colleagues at ACC. It provided a formal closure to the project at ACC, though only two participants handed in their projects at this time. However, each participant achieved some completion by producing a one-page summary which was circulated at the workshop as a collected document (reproduced here as Appendix 1).

Work at PPP

At PPP, the data analysis happened quite differently. As a group project, it involved all the participants working together and a two-day workshop was planned for this purpose in July. External factors and the difficulty of getting people together postponed this workshop until August.

Friday, 9 July: Call from Liz re workshop.
Tuesday, 13 July: Flurry of calls about the workshop.
Wednesday, 14 July: Calls with Roni: workshop postponed.
Tuesday, 20 July: Delivered reading list and other documents to PPP.
Friday, 23 July: Phone call with Liz.
Tuesday, 3 August: Translating PPP discs.
Monday, 9 August: Printed PPP transcripts.
Tuesday, 10 August: Data analysis workshop, Greensboro.
Wednesday, 11 August: Data analysis workshop cont.
Sunday, 15 August: Sorting PPP's transcript files on computer.
Friday, 10 September: Meeting Liz, Kannapolis, to sort transcripts.
Friday, 24 September: Workshop, Southern Pines.
Wednesday, 29 September: Workshop Southern Pines. [Research Journal entries]

During the week preceding the planned workshop in July, a young man was killed by police while being arrested in Concord, a town adjacent to Kannapolis, and a community in which PPP worked. This and subsequent events were the major issue for PPP during this period. Since some of the staff could not be present for the workshop, the workshop was postponed. A

new date had to be renegotiated several times until it was finally decided to meet mid-August, when Roni couldn't be present but Billy could.

The major interactions during this time involved:

- Negotiating and renegotiating times to meet.
- Working with Liz to manage their transcriptions and their computer files. (In preparation for the workshop, all the transcript files were translated at Literacy South into Mac format - they had been transcribed on an IBM - so that some analysis and writing could be done at the workshop using a Literacy South Mac.)
- The workshops.

Workshop 1: August 10, 11

The data analysis workshop subsequently took place in Greensboro on August 10 and 11, with Cheryl, Liz and Billy. The group had available transcripts of recordings of three parts of their work: their study group, their organizing work in Midway, and their Finding Our Voices project. These transcriptions included planning meetings, work sessions, especially of the Study Group, and debriefing meetings.

In preparation, Andy had written (August 4) suggesting how they might approach the transcripts (see **Figure 11**).

The workshop didn't start until 11:45 but the workshop settled down to address the question:

> "the thing about the study groups is that as a grassroots campaigning organization you, you've taken a step to engage in a particular sort of activity. So one of the questions ... might be why as PPP we bother to do this sort of work, it might be worth talking about that first of all to see what that's about, and then we can actually ask ourselves whether, what we find from that, whether those things apply to the other projects, or whether the literacy element is something different. So we've developed something, a frame of finding out what you think you're about, and then we can use that to give ourselves a language if you like, for looking at the data, does that make sense? So, why don't you start off telling us, sharing with us why, how you came to do this and what the purpose of it is, cause clearly, there's lots of literacy provisions and why PPP, what are you trying to do and what's special about it, which of your agendas are you meeting, those sorts of things?" [Workshop]

This generated a lengthy discussion about PPP's work, which led the group to formulate a framework of eight reasons why PPP does literacy work (see **Figure 12**).

The next session involved using this framework to analyze the transcripts, to find examples of these areas of work in practice. The group started by sharing one theme from the list, each taking two transcripts, reading the transcript and noting examples of the theme. Then they shared the results of this process.

I have been thinking about the Workshop next week and how we can best prepare for it, and then use the time most usefully. At the same time I don't want to suggest lines of thought which would structure your thinking in particular ways. In the end, I thought it might be helpful to ask you to think about a couple of things that I would like to ask at the beginning of the first session on Tuesday; if you think about them beforehand, as you read and think about the transcripts, that will be helpful.

What I would like to ask is this:

1. Why do you do literacy work at PPP? What is your purpose in running the study groups? How else do you see your work as having a literacy agenda, and in what ways?
2. Then, in what ways do the activities you have been documenting meet this literacy agenda, not in theory, but practically, as we can read it from the data you have collected?
3. Then, how is the literacy agenda met? What happens in your activities which touch on literacy - how do the participants participate and what are the things that happen that support your literacy agenda, (or that conflict with it for that matter)?

I hope this isn't too close to the event to be useful and we can anyway, pick up these themes on Tuesday morning. We're looking forward to seeing you all next week.

Figure 11: Preparation for transcript analysis, PPP

REASONS FOR LITERACY AS PART OF PPP'S WORK

1. MATERIALS

There is a lack of suitable materials: own language, level, experience.

2. DEFINING OUR VOICES

To dispel the myth that white males are superior: we are the experts about our own lives, making the connection between literacy and power.

3. USING LITERACY AS A WAY OF EMPOWERING MEMBERS

Their organizing activities, i.e. getting them to do it, including leadership development.

4. THE STUDY GROUP PROVIDES A SAFE SPACE FOR LEARNING

The study group is a safe place to take risks, a place for structured critical thinking.

5. THE STUDY GROUP MAY PROVIDE A CHANNEL OR ROUTE INTO PPP

6. LITERACY IS A WAY OF DEVELOPING AWARENESS, RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS

7. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Learning reading and writing, learning how to take risks etc.

8. TO MAKE CONNECTIONS

Across areas, races, different groups.

Figure 12: Developing analytical framework, PPP

The group then moved on to perform a similar analysis of all the transcripts using all the themes that appeared in the transcripts. This exercise continued into the second day and the results were then shared. The intention to sort the selections into thematic groups using the computer was

thwarted because it was difficult to match the computer files with the transcripts.

The following Sunday, Andy spent the day sorting, labeling and indexing the computer transcripts files. At a meeting in Kannapolis, Andy spent a morning working with Liz, showing her how to make new files of the thematic selections from the transcripts. This became the raw material for the next workshop.

This workshop had started strongly and achieved considerable progress despite several unfavorable circumstances (e.g., the size of the hotel room, the late start, the poor state of the computer files). The participants were clearly engaged and the analysis was strongly rooted both in their data and in their work.

The participants had important personal issues on their minds during this meeting; nonetheless, the group was committed. Since the work was not completed by the end of the event, two more one-day workshops were planned for September in Southern Pines, near home for Billy.

Workshop 3: September 29

This third workshop continued to analyze the same Study Group session, by brainstorming a list of critical questions about PPP's work that could be applied to the case study on Randall Kenan (see **Figure 14**).

The energy of the group was beginning to run low again, but they agreed to meet one more time in October to pull the various pieces they had written into a report.

Issues Arising

Uncertainty Late in the Process

The uncertainty that had been evident early in the Project reappeared during this phase. However, this time it was much more to do with technical processes - how to analyze data that had been collected, how to write it up, and what constituted an acceptable report. Interestingly, some of the participants who were most unsure early on in the Project exhibited no great

anxiety at this point, finishing their projects quickly. For some, the anxiety of finishing stretched beyond the formal closure. This was one of the periods of greatest stress for the Literacy South staff, as they waited to see if everybody would complete their work.

1. Issues about the Organizational Agenda:
- What is the process by which we decide the agenda?
- What is the process where we work through issues?
- How do we address difficult issues?

2. External Influences:
- Did getting a grant (or external resources and connections) affect how we did literacy work? Did it change the way we might have been working?
- What is the connection between the impact of external events compared with a membership program?

3. Staff Issues and Perspectives:
- Role of personal agendas (e.g. sexuality) in affecting PPP work, what we focus on. Has it affected how we involve ourselves? Has it been congruent with the organizational agenda? Has it affected what we do? i.e. the Randall Kenan story.
- Has my personal agenda shut me down, scared me off, stopped me doing good quality work.
- How do we connect our personal issues with the larger issues of PPP?

4. Member Role:
- What is the impact of members in a membership program?
- How do we bridge our agendas and members' agendas.
- How do members affect or have an influence on us?
- Who controls the process?

5. Combining these Issues:
- How do we combine effective work with work that involves members fully? Time is a big issue here, as well as control.

Figure 14: Critical issues about PPP's work

The ACC workshop at the end of the Project insured that everyone produced a synopsis; however, some also handed in their final reports on that date, some nearly two months later, and one not at all.

Technical Processes

Technical processes (e.g., handling tapes, transcripts and communication) became important during this phase. Problems with transcription at PPP, as well as making them angry, also made their work more difficult.

The frequency of contact with ACC during this period was helpful for several participants. It could have been facilitated by fax and modem connections between participants and Literacy South. However, the time pressures during this period precluded developing new technological connections, and, unfortunately, they had not been developed earlier. This suggests that technological processes need sorting out early in a Project.

Technical Support Role

The analogy of learning literacy skills as an adult, with learning research skills, is very marked in this Project. Perhaps it can be restated in terms of the universal difficulty of writing - that writing at <u>any level</u> is a difficult activity, and that for many people, having a coach, someone to provide support during the process, is critical to a successful conclusion.

Confidentiality Again

The issue of confidentiality featured again as different people engaged in transcribing and typing at ACC. This was particularly notable as the secretary left and Marion took on more and more work. This did not seem to cause problems, but in a project where everyone knows everyone, it could have caused serious problems. This is not just a simple issue of how to protect the anonymity of informants, but of how to share difficult issues in a non-threatening manner.

Quality

The question of quality is difficult as there is no standard which has to be achieved: each person is, to a large degree responsible for defining his or her own standard. However, some pieces of work stood out because of the thoroughness with which they were handled; their quality was related to the time and struggle that were committed to the reports. However, there was no relationship between quality and finishing a project quickly or slowly.

Source Documents for the Chapter:

- Outline program and Workplan for ACC workshop 2.
- Evaluation for ACC workshop 2.
- Reading list.
- Notes on writing up reports, for ACC. (reproduced above)

CHAPTER 9

REPORTING FINDINGS AND FINISHING WRITING

Timeline: October to November, 1993

This phase is concerned mainly with the participants reporting their projects. However, many of them were finishing their writing during October.

Work at ACC

Although the ACC participants reported on their work at the workshop on October 1 and produced summary reports for that occasion, only two handed in their finished reports at that time. The rest delivered their work during October, with one finishing right at the end of the month, and one not at all.

Friday, 1 October: ACC final workshop. Received Angela and Ann's reports.

Monday, 4 October: Bridget delivered revised manuscript.

Tuesday, 5 October: Meeting Linda; received her report.

Thursday, 7 October: Individual meeting Marion.

Monday, 11 October: Individual meeting Pete.

Thursday, 14 October: Individual meeting Marion.
Received Don's report.

Monday, 18 October: Phone call with John.

Tuesday, 19 October: Meeting, Ray and Michelle. Received their report.

Wednesday, 20 October: Phone call with Marion. Phone call with Michelle to provide feedback.

Tuesday, 26 October: Individual meeting John. Individual meeting Marion.

Thursday, 28 October: Individual meeting Marion.

Tuesday, 2 November: Individual meeting Marion.

Thursday, 4 November: Individual meeting John. Individual meeting Marion.

Thursday, 11 November: Received Marion's report.
[Research Journal entries]

The Final Workshop: October 1

The final ACC workshop (from 9:00 to 12:00) provided an opportunity for the participants to report their findings to their colleagues at ACC. Seven of the project participants were present: Michelle was absent as she was teaching and John arrived at 10:30. Eleven other ACC staff were present as well as two visitors from Central Carolina Community College. Ray and Linda facilitated the meeting.

The synopses of each project were distributed at the beginning of the session. The participants made short presentations about their work, followed by questions and a short general question session at the end. The event was conducted by Linda and Ray, however. Literacy South provided lunch and our staff attended the event, participated in the conversation following each presentation, and asked the group questions about the experience at the end. Some of the ACC staff talked about the implications of some of their projects for other work being done in the Department.

As well as providing closure, the event affirmed the work of the participants. The workshop closed with a consensus that this type of work should continue at ACC:

> "To cut to the chase, we will continue this, we will continue to do this, we will obtain funding, I think probably through the foundation. We will have an amount of money every year, and we will advertise this as an activity that you can participate in, you will be submitting your research plans, and we will have an independent panel, a panel independent of this, of this program, to review them and select people to be able to do it. So, we do plan to continue it. I think you've seen from today, that a lot of very good things came out of this, not the least of which was the getting to know our group better, our co-workers better, that was good. Learning something about research, that was good, losing our fear of research, that was good. Actually doing the project, that was good, and we heard comments about what was good about that. In my opinion, the actual activity of doing something different, helps to stimulate us in different ways and, and one of my philosophies is that we always try it another way, if it doesn't work, then we try it another way, and I think this sort of points out, how valuable that it. The other kinds of things I would mention, the low points would have to have been when people started out in one direction and found out they had to go in another direction, that was really frustrating. There were some humorous things that happened. For example, the viewing of the videotape and we found that it couldn't be done locally cause people took it too personally, and they saw themselves on the videotape, and weren't willing to, to really evaluate a co-worker. And so that had to be done by somebody else, I think there was some humor in that. And I had some experiences, people made

comments along the way that I thought were meaningful. And on a serious note, John felt that his project was one of closure, because he was going to cease working with that population, and he took that very seriously, but very positively, because it was a very nice way to end that relationship on a very high note. And Pete made the comment several times that he felt like what he had done was something that should be done in every class, and I thought that was a neat kind of thing also. So, we thought it was positive, we were very pleased with the outcome and we're going to continue to do it." [Workshop Transcript]

Individual Work

Bridget and Linda delivered their reports on October 4 and 5. The others worked on through the month.

- **Pete:** By early October, Pete was nearly finished but still wanted reassurance about what he had written:

> "He's nearly finished, but wanted some assurance about what he'd done. He thought he needed a piece to pull his findings together which is what I thought too. What's interesting is that his style is totally different from everyone else's, in fact, everyone has adopted a very different style of writing up which is very refreshing." [Research Journal entry]

He finished on October 14.

- **Ray and Michelle:** Andy met with them both on October 19. Michelle had written a draft report and they gave it to Andy at this meeting. Andy read it overnight and phoned some minor comments to Michelle. The report was finished soon after.

- **Marion:** Andy met with Marion six times during October. At each meeting, they reviewed what she had done, devised targets for the next meeting and looked at ways that her text might be further clarified. Her slow but steady pace was partly due to competing responsibilities. However, she also was working painstakingly, choosing her words with great care and precision; the effect of this careful use of language was to raise Marion's work to a different level of analysis than others had achieved since she was taking pains to describe the patterns of attitudes she found with great exactness:

> "She's working slowly but steadily. She's an English specialist and it shows. She works painstakingly on her language but in the process of choosing the best word to characterize her respondents, identifies key issues." [Research Journal entry]

She finished on November 11.

- **John** reported at length at the October 1 workshop. The research had represented closure for him on work he had been doing; he was now involved in new teaching assignments in a different area. Andy spoke to John on the telephone twice in October, and met with John on October 26 and November 4:

> "He still hasn't finished, in fact showed me his introduction, only hand written. Hasn't done any more. I suggested he take it to Marion to get typed but he said he'd take it to the Job Coop. He said the problem was time, that he hadn't got time except at weekends." [Research Journal entry]

Andy left him to make contact when he wanted to meet again; his written report is still pending.

Work at PPP

The final workshop at PPP was held on October 22. At that workshop, the various pieces that had been drafted at previous meetings were put together on computer and organized into a report format. Andy helped the group edit this draft report and write some connecting text. The group also reflected on their involvement in the project which, they felt, had afforded them an opportunity for critical reflection on their work. Cheryl and Liz did some further editing on the report and sent it in at the end of October.

Issues Arising

Methods of Reporting

Early in the Project, and at several points during the work, we emphasized that a written report was not the only valid form of reporting. Several people found writing a report difficult, and several people reported more effectively orally. However, the written report is readily understood, has general acceptability, and offers a ready form of closure on a piece of work. Final, presentations could have been made using other media, especially as some participants used video and many used audio taping, but they all were in writing. We did not help participants develop alternatives to written reports, however, this area should be addressed in subsequent work.

SECTION III: REFLECTIONS

In this Section, two chapters reflect about:

- The staff development impacts of this practitioner research project.
- The process of conducting practitioner research.

The work is set in a wider context of other practice and of the literature on practitioner research.

CHAPTER 10

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPACT ON THE ORGANIZATION

In this Project, practitioner research was undertaken not just for the intrinsic value of its outcomes but because it was seen as having a potential to provide staff development: this Chapter looks at the staff development impact of the work. Outcomes were identifiable for both individuals and the organizations concerned, and we differentiate these here by terming them "staff development" and "organizational development".

Data Sources

The data about the staff development impact of the Project are from three sources:

- Each participant was interviewed early and late in the project about their experience and the impact of the work. These interviews were conducted by Pearl, and in one case by Hanna, to provide an opportunity for the participants to talk with someone other than Andy, with whom they had been working closely. Additionally, Andy interviewed Ray and Michelle to help them in clarifying one phase of their work.
- Some information was generated about the impact of the work in the course of other activities such as individual meetings, dialogue groups and workshops, many of which were tape recorded.
- Some of the staff at ACC addressed or raised issues about staff development impacts in the course of their research.

The data is looked at person by person, and then summarized.

Work at ACC

Pete

Pete was interviewed by Pearl in April and September. He had only started teaching the previous September and felt unsure about himself in this role. His project, looking at his students' previous educational experience, enabled him to develop a deeper understanding of his students which, in turn, impacted on his teaching.

> "I think it's helped me to be more sensitive to the backgrounds, looking and planning for what I'm planning in my project. It's helped me to be more aware of the backgrounds of people and of the - I guess you'd say rate of learning for lack

> of a better definition. It's easy to become discouraged I think at times when maybe you feel like a student should be further along. If you can just stop for a little while and think back to past situations and you know the background of that student and then where they're coming from, not only from previous earlier experiences but where they are right at the time, you know, with struggling with some things, and their personal lives. It's helped me have a better understanding. I think I've been, I'm sure I've been more sensitive to the backgrounds of the different students I'm working with and in turn, I feel like that's helped me to be a better teacher, and maybe change direction sometimes in how I would approach you know certain things." [Pete interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

His research enabled him to establish a deeper level of trust with his students so that they could share things with him that they might not have done. This also reflected the time that the project provided that is not normally available to spend getting to know the students.

> "Some of the interviews that I did, the students were willing to talk more, not on tape, not in the actual interview, but shared some things with me about their personal lives that help me understand. I would say a deeper level of communication, I don't know exactly how to say it, it's better. I can relate to students better, because of this. I think that had I not done this, had I not had the interviews, for one thing, those students that were interviewed, I would never have reached that level of trust. I think I would never have reached that level of communication with them and understanding things as I said they shared with me, not on the tape or not in the actual interview, but other things in their lives that were maybe a little too personal for them to actually say on tape. And I don't think I would have ever, well I'm sure I would never have understood that or reached that level, had I not talked to them about, you know, what I was doing, or purposely doing, and they just seemed to want to give to me what they could, within limits." [Pete interview with Pearl, 9/7/93]

> "One of the things in particular that I found after doing the taped interviews, the students that when I first approached them about it were reluctant, and then after we actually did the taped interview, most everyone of the students talked quite a lot off the record, about things in their personal lives which helped me with, tremendously with an insight into their, where they are and their involvement in the class." [Dialogue Group meeting, 9/14/93]

Pete would like to build this time into his regular teaching.

> "Basically it comes down to this, is the way I see it, and everyone is pushing for time, for instance, I've started teaching now over at BI, and they have a curriculum there, they have some deadlines that have to be made. So when you go in with your students, there's an almost instant right into the program that they're working on, the phase, the level, wherever they are. It's like walk straight in you know, and get straight on the computer or go straight to the group work or table work. And I realize that, because you know, the time is of essence. And yet, it would be good for me if I could have more time just to not do one-on-one interviews as I did, but have more time to sit and talk with that person. We do interviews, you know, with each student, each quarter, there's an

> interview and there's some interaction between the instructor and the student. But I would like to somehow have more time myself, I feel like this would be valuable. Not so much as the research project, but just as a time to really get to know the student and understand. I think I could be more helpful, I could be more effective."

The whole process also developed his confidence, both in terms of his teaching and in his ability to complete such a project.

Michelle

Michelle was interviewed by Pearl in April. A second interview did not happen as she was involved in practice teaching for her college course and it was difficult to find times for meetings. Andy interviewed her in July to document her view of learner-centered instruction as part of her project.

Michelle had been involved in the previous Literacy South UPS project and had been trying learner-centered approaches in her class. She had also been engaged in her Bachelors degree for the previous four years and was already immersed in research:

> "I've been in school the past four years. I've done enough things in the past four years, so it doesn't threaten me in the least. This research is different from any research I have done. Part of our research will be the process we went through." [Michelle interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

Therefore, the impact of the Project is harder to isolate in Michelle's case. It seems that she was consolidating the experience she had gained in other settings. Additionally, she thought the interaction with the other teachers in the Project was a source of learning.

> "Pearl: have you given any thought to the results of your research and how that could or would affect the way that you teach once you go back into teaching? Do you think that any of the results of your research will even have an impact on the way that you teach in the future?
>
> Michelle: I think it could. I mean I'm constantly learning something new. And hearing what they have, the other instructors have to say and what the students have to say will probably help me, further what I'm doing. I am a firm believer in a success oriented classroom, student-centered classroom, because it works. I mean, I have proof, but, it'll probably just help me refine it. Get more ideas, 'cause there's always, we all see things through our own eyes, and there's other perspectives and so hearing somebody else say well this may be a student throwing out well this is what I'm seeing here, that might help me to refine, or develop a different way of looking at it, so." [Michelle interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

Ann

Ann was interviewed by Pearl in April and September. The Project gave her the opportunity to reflect on her work.

> "I think it's been interesting, and it's made me sit down and look at - well my question is what effects my class is having on the students, and it's really made me sit down and look at that and take time to do that. So I think that's been quite helpful as far as the project is concerned.

It gave her the chance to meet with colleagues - who are usually isolated - and gave her the opportunity to share ideas with them. It also provided them with an opportunity to work as one unit, to share some common ground.

> "It's been very interesting, in the meetings, hearing the other questions and seeing what they are finding out. It's been very beneficial just to see the different areas that they're working in and hearing some of their results. I think just having the time to sit down with the other instructors too, 'cause we don't have a lot of time to do that. Most of our time is just devoted to the classroom and I think just having that time to be able to sit with the other instructors and hearing their thoughts and things.
>
> Pearl: Especially since you're at different locations.
>
> Ann: Right. It has a tendency I think to make you feel more like one unit, than everybody's working in separate directions. Probably that has been one of the things that I've enjoyed the most about it is just being about to be together with the other instructors and having a common ground that we're working on."

It did not, however, have an immediate impact on her classroom teaching. Indeed, the data suggest that it was the interview process she had developed during her routine work with students that made it relatively easy for her to conduct interviews for this study.

> "I don't really know that it has changed anything, as far as the class is concerned. It has shown me, I guess results of what has happened in the classroom more than anything else - my question, my research topic is what affects are my classes having on the students, both on the job and in their personal lives. And that's what they are showing me, is you know, okay, we studied graphs and charts in class and this is the way it's helped me as far as my job is concerned and it's also helped me in these particular ways as far as my life is concerned. So I don't think it has altered what I have taught in the classroom, but it is just showing me more of what the results are once they've learned these things."

Ann developed a deeper understanding of the impact of her work on her students' lives.

"And I think what I am seeing is that when we started the classes, the purpose of the classes were to increase the skills, the basic skills of the employees. And with it being workplace literacy, the primary objective is to make them better employees. But what we're seeing is that it's also just having the snowball effect. Yes, it is helping them on the job, but it's helping them I think even more outside the job, then, it's not a little isolated area where it's helping them. And I think we realized that would happen but I don't think that I realized quite to what extent it would make a difference in their lives. I think the biggest conclusion, in fact I was working on this last night, is that it has eliminated fear for most of them, for most of the people. And it, I think so often what you see is that - on the job, or anywhere, that people do not try something new because of a fear that they're going to fail.

And I hear, over and over again now, they say I'm not afraid anymore to try something new, whether it be the computer or a different job, or whatever. So I think, lumping it all together, I mean there's a lot of specifics like that, that people have said that they now can do their check - they will now write checks, they can keep their own check balance. You know, there's a lot of little specifics like that, that they've talked about. I think it all goes back to the part that, that they aren't afraid to try anything. You know, they've got more self-confidence and we're getting rid of that fear of the unknown."

Additionally, one of Ann's classes was videotaped by Ray and Michelle as part of their project, and the tape was shown to three focus groups. This exercise had the potential to create some other reflection about her classroom work, but there was no debriefing about this during, or as part of the Project, though it was expected that there would be some discussion about it as the Project ended.

Angela

Angela was interviewed by Pearl in July and again in September. She was absent on maternity leave for a couple of months during the early part of the Project. Angela was positive about the overall project. This was evident not just from her responses when interviewed but in her greater involvement later in the Project - she facilitated several dialogue groups and workshops.

Angela is more aware of students' attitudes and interests.

"Angela: Just being more aware of attitudes and interest towards learning, and trying to incorporate some of those attitudes and interest in the lessons. And listening to the other projects, too, just being more aware and more in tune with what students want and don't want, and what teachers want and don't want."

Angela's project had a direct influence on how she plans to approach a new class, taking time to find out about students' attitudes and interests so that she can plan lessons that interest the students.

> "Well I'll be more aware of student attitudes and interest. I'm getting ready to start a new class, and in Graham, of my own. I'll be running four days a week. And one of the first things I intend to do is give out a survey of what are your hobbies and interest, and talk about those things. And they've already answered certain questions about what they want to learn, and I'll try to incorporate as many of those interest into the classroom activities, their workskills. We have to do x amount of curriculum according to their workskills, and computer, and I'll try to make lessons that I know that they'll be interested in. Because they get tired and bored in just a regular GED class, unless there's something they're really interested in, they won't come back. So I want to try to hold their interest as much as possible because at BI, they're paid as part of their working shift, like one hour and a half of their workshift, you know, they go to class and get paid. But at (company name), it's different. They come one hour on their own, and then the company pays one hour. So it's not as - they won't be as - well I shouldn't say they won't be as motivated. They don't have to - already, they have to, you know, come on their own time, one hour."

Angela thinks the group times affect teaching effectiveness positively:

> "Interacting with other people and I thought their projects were very interesting and I'm excited about those, and seeing the results of their projects. About myself - I know that I need to have spent more time on it than I did. Because you're so, in so many places at so many different times, our schedules are crazy, and we don't have a 9 to 5 job, and it's real hard to get everybody together at the same times, to have these meetings or whatever. But yes, I think that would be real helpful for us, and as long as we know what everybody's doing, I think it would help us in our classes."

She found it helpful listening to the other projects and was clear about the benefits of sharing the work with other colleagues at the college.

> "I know I'm real excited about the ending workshop we're getting ready to have, where everybody will come together and share results with everybody else. And I'd just like to have some feedback from other people other than the ones involved in the project. I thought it was a learning experience. It was useful. And I'd like to do it again if I have more time."

Angela also learned about research.

> "You can devote whatever time you want to devote to it, and it doesn't have to be a thesis, you can write something, 'cause mine is not going to be as large as somebody else's videos, and all that. I didn't do all that stuff. But I would say to that you can make it as small or as large as you want to and devote whatever time you have to it. But whatever amount of time you do devote to it in the project, it's still worthwhile to do, and to learn something and to share with others."

Bridget

Bridget was interviewed by Pearl in April and September. Bridget is a site manager; she is not teaching but is responsible for curriculum development for a workplace literacy project.

Bridget had been involved in staff development with Literacy South for the previous two years and was committed to a learner-centered model of teaching. A major outcome for her was in deepening her critical understanding of the process, particularly in a workplace setting.

> "When I developed a lesson, the most valuable piece of it is when I take it into the classroom and you know, field test it, which is what we're required to do. And this BI project is that you have to develop something, you field test it, you revise it and then you call it, you know, the final form. Well, I mean I really think that there is no final final form, but I've really learned that part of the process, part of a necessary part of the process and something that always yields the most fruit, is when you try it out on one student or one class and you get all the bugs out and then you go back and you change all those things based on everything they said and everything that was frustrating to them, you change it, and then it becomes better the next time you use it with the other classes. Because you've seen all the things that didn't work. And I think that's a part of - I think that's research. That's a part of the research process."

The Project was a learning experience in an area she wanted to know more about - conducting qualitative research.

> "First of all it's meant, it's been good to do this kind of research because I've been aware of qualitative research and of doing things in a participatory kind of manner, this kind of research, but I've never actually had an opportunity to do it, so it's been really just personally gratifying to actually do that kind of research."

> "I think that in the beginning when I thought of the terms, you know, the terms of the project, participatory research as staff development, I was like oh yeah, it just helps me as an individual to develop my own professionalism let's say a critical thinker, and one who knows that much more about doing research, and therefore he listens, and he is more professional or better at what I do, in this profession. But I think I see more than I did 6 months ago, which maybe wasn't necessarily an expectation of mine, cause I just didn't know. But I think having gone through the experience of doing my own project, and meeting with - in the workshops and the dialogue groups, I think, and reading the literature on staff development and doing it in this kind of way, I think I really understand a lot more how - how much any literacy program, especially ours, but any literacy program, can benefit from this kind of ongoing project."

> "I do think it is research but it's research of a different kind and I think it's like when you use the word literacy, you use certain, the common public thinks of a certain stereotypic image, and I think that if you only think of a word as

being one thing, than you don't realize that there's a very diverse way to look at it, and I think that's the same way with the term research. But I think we have all been trained to think of research as collecting a certain kind of statistics and you know, doing research in a certain way, but I think we have discovered that there are maybe different ways to do research depending on what we feel is appropriate for what we want to find out. And I think that if we don't use the term research, than maybe we're not - I don't know if we're doing a disservice, but I think that we want the rest of the staff to know that there are other ways to do research that can benefit us as professional people in the field of literacy. So maybe it's more changing our own awareness about it what this work means to us and what are the important pieces of it." [Dialogue Group meeting, 9/14/93]

The meetings provided a forum for Bridget to learn from her colleagues, and it decreased her sense of isolation.

"I think it's also meant, it's also been good to me because although I think in the beginning our dialogue groups were a little bit of a struggle for some of us to be meeting together regularly as a, you know, as a team, as a whole group, because it's something that we didn't normally do on a regular basis. I think now it seems like the dialogue group is really, people in the group I think are really benefiting from that and they seem to be reacting differently. And me included, I'm just really heartened by that aspect of this project because I think I'm the sort of a person that really gets a lot out of being able to just to talk through things with co-workers, and I think because our former structure hadn't really allowed for that too much, I think that that's been helpful to me."

"I really think it brings the staff together - especially in this field, (we are) so isolated. You know, we've got people going all over the county to do classes. Sometimes we're not, you know, the people in this building, who are teaching day in and day out are not quite as isolated. But I think that it really - it helps to break down that barrier of isolationism, you know. I think it helps us to gain more from each other's experience and wisdom. I can make a lot of assumptions about what I know about my work and what Ann knows and what Charlene knows and what Angela knows. And I can assume that I know the kind of classroom that they conduct and the kind of activities that they do, and why they do it. But unless you actually sit down and have a chance to meet with people periodically, and talk about you know, the problems that come up with our own - I think, so I think that this kind of project definitely helps that kind of staff development."

The Project helped her specifically with a work goal.

"It's meant that I've been able to look at my project, which is looking at the workplace curriculum. It was my burning question, which is how can I, you know, sort of meet the project goals of a national workplace project and design a curriculum that's somewhat participatory. I really had some concerns that meeting the project goals was really going to allow me to do a participatory kind of a thing. And I think there are, the project has allowed me to actually look at that, in some sort of a systematic way. I think it's meant a lot to me to know that there were some things that we did with the curriculum that really were what I would call participatory. So that has been the good part. I think

I'm just excited about my own project and the fact that I'm really learning from it."

"You get to the point where you say well, is this going to be worth anything and is this just sort of going around in circles in your own head about something. But I'm seeing where there actually was a lot of what I would just say is you know, there's a lot, there's a rich set of data from that journal. And I was thinking well, I've got to have that and then I've got to have all my other pieces of papers that, and other things that help me with the curriculum. But I'm seeing where I really seem to use most of the journal. And what I'm learning is that there really are patterns in it. Patterns of people that I relied on to help make it more participatory, you know, the instructors, the learners, the different people that I was involved with at different points. What else have I learned. I've learned that it's hard to do this kind of work when I do it in bits and pieces. You really have to like concentrate your time and your thought and your energies. But you can't just expect to do it an hour here and an hour there, because it takes you an hour to start thinking about it."

"I would definitely say I feel much more comfortable having gone through the experience of writing the curriculum and constantly reflecting on it. And thinking what's participatory and what's not, I definitely feel more strongly that the curriculum does not have to be like an on the job training manual. Which I think was part of my initial struggle. It was like that was sort of what I was reading out of the literature, that it had to be more training people about their job versus what is it that they want to come in and learn in the classroom. I think that I know see the curriculum can mean many more things, depending on the individual student."

Her work is now much more grounded in knowledge that she has generated herself.

"I mentioned the word struggle. I was really having a time interpreting what I thought I was reading in all the literature about workplace literacy and workplace curriculums and what they should look like and what they should teach. I was really having a time with that and what I thought I was, the messages I was getting from the evaluator and the project director, and you know, like this is the purpose of this kind of funding. I was really having a struggle with that, because it seemed like there was not enough leeway for me to go into a classroom and say okay, what is it that you really, you guys really want to learn here, do you really want to learn about more of these skills that relate directly to your job, or is that not important to you? Do you feel like you know your job inside and out, you know. I didn't really feel like I had the leeway to go into a classroom and ask people what do you think should be in this curriculum, you know. So I saw the curriculum itself, this piece of paper, or this set of, this book of papers, that had to be developed as more narrow, versus now, I just feel much more comfortable that if anybody asks me whether it's the government in Washington or the evaluator or a person coming in from out of the blue saying what does workplace curriculum mean to you, I feel like I have more firsthand experience being able to say it can be many different things, and here's why."

Marion

Marion was interviewed by Pearl in April and September. Marion examined ABE staff member's perspectives on their job, and, therefore, her outcomes were less directly related to classroom practice. She had read an article about ABE staff which had inspired her to pursue this issue, an issue she was aware of from her own experience and observation. Marion is an experienced teacher (a lead instructor); she had attended the Literacy South UPS training and had incorporated learning from that in her teaching.

Marion was pleased that she had the opportunity to investigate and evaluate her own issue; this was both about the opportunity and the fact that she could choose her own topic.

> "This is something that I have really wanted to do for quite a while, to be given the opportunity to look at, you know, some issue that we could investigate and evaluate and you know, do some of our own, what I call original thinking about and writing, and our own opinions about things that - we just don't have an opportunity to do. That's something that I've looked forward to doing for a long time that we just haven't had the opportunity to do. That's one of the things that I'm enjoying about this project and that we're working on."

The project helped her deal with her frustrations as a teacher.

> "I hope it's going to help me in the classroom. For my personal, my personal interest in that, in this particular project is that I know there are frustrations in what we do because of the way this particular organization works, our particular department works. A lot of our instructors get very frustrated with what they consider inequities in you know, in what they're doing, what they're being asked to do. You know, the pay, the lack of benefits always comes up. There are a lot of frustrations, yet there are rewards because we know, they stay here. We've had people who've been here for several years, there have got to be rewards, I'm going to find that out too. But I think it helps me, it's going to help me in the classroom deal with my frustrations, because I know, and I've heard several instructors say that the frustrations of what they are expected to do in the time allotted, in class, is so overwhelming, that it affects their spending time with the students. I'm hoping to get some information for myself and for all of us, for all of us who work, you know, in the classroom, to be able to deal with that a little bit better. How can we, you know, is there something we can do to you know, alleviate some of that frustration, cause it does affect them. I hear that a lot. The things that they need to get done in class, that's not directly involving the students." [4/16/93]

It also developed her self awareness in dealing with her colleagues.

"A lot was mentioned about the office tension and the different personalities in working in the office, the treatment that they perceive they get, which they aren't all together pleased with and so I've been much more aware of you know, when teachers are coming into the office or asking me for help or I'm supposed to assist them in some way, I'm much more, I think aware of how I'm coming across to them, because I'm not their boss. You know, they don't work for me, I'm working with them, I'm supposed to support them. Because that's part of - well all of us here are support staff for the instructors.... You know, I'm assisting you, I'm assisting you, we're working together."

Because her project was about the staff and issues they experienced, her report provided much material that could be used in organizational development.

"I've learned specific things that teachers are, or would like to see improved, things that we can see improvement. A lot of the things that they were upset about.

One of the things that I remember from the last small group - well, actually, it was two people, that I interviewed the last group. One of the things that we, that came out of that group was that it wasn't just a gripe session you know, we do have some things we'd like to see changed, but there are some, you know, also, we're trying to mention the positive things about the program and about the things that are going on they do realize that are positive. And so it wasn't - I felt good about that, that it wasn't just a list of complaints, of gripes about the program and about personalities. And it was constructive, that, you know, what can come out of this that we can do something about. There are some things we possibly can't change at this time, but there are lots of things, I bet well several things that specifically we can do better. And in order to support the instructors, because - that's just my feeling, they are the core of the program." [9/7/93]

John

John was interviewed by Pearl in May. His research was useful in validating his work, helping to confirm his judgment.

"I think it's amazing from my doing this, how much I really, I do this kind of stuff all the time. And not in so much in a formal sense, but I'm always analyzing stuff and thinking you know, what does this mean and how does this impact on me and upon what I'm doing. I'm always making too quickly judgments about things I see and I think maybe one big reason I wanted to do this was so I could say now is this true or not, you know. Are the judgments I'm making really good judgments to make and will it be borne out by what I do with my project."

Group time offered John a chance to learn from his colleagues.

"I have my thing to do and they have their thing to do and in that respect it's been good too. We've been able to get together and spend time together, and talk about issues that all of us can relate to, and I think it's helped us. I found

out things about other teachers and things that they're doing I think that could help me.

I found out that there's a lot of interesting people under all this big umbrella of literacy that we work under, and that they have a lot of interesting things to say. And that you know, particularly, I think some of the older teachers, older in years and in terms of service, really have a lot of offer because they've been through a lot of the things I haven't been through and done a lot of things I haven't done, and therefore can give suggestions on how to be a better teacher. And that's what I want to be, is be a better teacher. I mean, this other, this project I'm doing now, doesn't really touch so much on that, touches on my feelings about transition. But maybe out of this process I'll also come away, you know, knowing how to be a better teacher too. Even though it's strictly you know, research. But being around these other teachers might impact me in that way too."

The process provided him with insights into learner centered education; having to take responsibility for their own projects and being offered the chance to take control allowed them to experience what it means to pass control to the learner.

"Well I think a lot of us coming in, we're result oriented, had this mind set that you know, you do things and you get results, and that's the way you learn and teach, and so being in this process was frustrating for some of us because we thought we want answers to things, clear-cut answers from you about what we should and shouldn't do. But I think I'm beginning to understand more and more why you're doing what you're doing. It's because you want us to find out own way, and you want us to be, through that process of finding our own way of how to do this, maybe we become more sensitive to helping students find their own way, be more learner-centered and not just try to give everybody everything. I think that's the way it is but more so, what do you think?"

Ray

Ray was interviewed by Pearl in July and September. Additionally, Andy interviewed him to help with his data analysis for his project. Ray has a supervisory role and is not a classroom teacher, but he works closely with classroom teachers.

"Everything that I'm learning on down the line to the classroom. Because that's basically where I view our task to be working with trying to you know, make the classroom better. So everything that I'm looking at, even in this project - is staffing, but I'm really looking, I'm more focused on the classroom. Because see I came into this program as an instructor recruiter, so my heart's always been in the class, even though now, I'm in an administrative position. So I'm looking at ways in which I can use any kind of training and knowledge from an administrative point in working with staff, but also how I can use that to help to train and better train instructors to use it in the classroom." [Ray interview with Pearl, 7/23/93]

He had been involved in the previous year's work with Literacy South and was already committed to participatory approaches to instruction. He is applying his understanding of participatory education to his administrative role through this Project.

> "I think you can't do participatory in one area, because if you don't do it in all areas, you lose, you lose control, okay. For example, if the instructors decide that they want to go down this canal, and you want to go this way, then which way do you go? You know, and that becomes an issue of control. Whereas if you do it in a participatory manner, the whole group decides without preconceived notions or ideas, as to how you're going to go."

Ray understood that engaging in the process is a key aspect of participatory work.

> "You decide. It's kind of like going on a trip. And the part of the excitement of the trip most people miss, because they are only concerned about the end destination. But yet the really most important part of the whole trip is the planning part, and all along the way, because you spend more time going and coming then you do there, most of the time. So that's one of the things I think that they would learn in the process of struggling with a team."

Ray also developed new insights into the social process of creating knowledge.

> "It's been exciting. And I don't do this as research, it's almost been problem-solving and sharing of problem-solving. Really what I think we've been doing, at least Michelle and I, is we've been wrestling with how we can take this data and this knowledge that we're gathering from everyone and really create a better way in which we can solve problems that arise within the program from the top all the way to the bottom, or from bottom to top, whatever you want say.
>
> This I have viewed to be a gaining, a gathering of additional knowledge that we didn't have, and it's also been a sharing of knowledge, because when we've been talking and sharing with one another through conversations and dialogue, we're not just learning something about our specific project or our specific area. But we're also learning bits and pieces of what the other person is wrestling and struggling with. Plus you get back to the thing I said earlier, we're learning more about one another. And I still, I said for years, and I'm finding out more and more, that the critical issue here is not anything other than really learning how to get along with another, and learning how to relate to one another, in a very human positive way."

Ray extended his understanding to the nature of expertise.

> "And respecting each other for who they - where they are and what they are. And no one person's in a better place than the other. I mean simply because I'm in charge of the program right now and the buck stops with me if the school

comes down with something, doesn't mean that I have any more knowledge than the six month old teacher out here, who may have tremendous life experience that I've never been a part of, but doesn't have a lot of knowledge of this program as far as the mechanics. But yet I can learn just as much from that person as that person can learn from me, and all of that knowledge is of equal value when you look at the whole total picture. And whereas in the past, I think, we traditionally looked at people in certain positions, because of their title or whatever, or if they've been here a longer time, even if it's an instructor, automatically having more knowledge. And so therefore, they're supposed to be listened to. It's the same thing with research, if a person's written a lot of articles and they had their name, and it could be political, and it could be that someone had plenty of money to print all their stuff and get it out, well all of a sudden they become the "expert and the authority." It's not true. The authority and the expert is all of those people combining their knowledge together, and I think that's the thing that we really have found in working in the research and enjoying the fact that it was not the traditional kind of research which is boring."

The work helped the staff involved to be more sensitive to each other.

"I think what we've learned in this thus far has really helped us, the staff, to be more sensitive to one another, I think especially research, the people who are doing the research got to know one another much better, so we feel more comfortable, we feel better. And I think the instructors feel much better with the whole process of what they've been trying to do, is research and then in transferring that into the classroom. So I personally feel that the whole experience has been positive. Cause I knew we were going to have frustration. See I've done this before in other settings, wrestled with it, participatory philosophy is not new to me, it's my basic lifestyle, and I try to do that at home and everywhere else that I move. So it was not a new concept to me. But implementing it here in this workplace, in the manner in which we're trying to do it now, and I think the research has been very helpful in giving us some extra energy and impetus to really move on and struggle with it even more." [Ray interview with Pearl, 7/23/93]

Ray's project also confirmed his direction with his work.

"We learned a great deal and confirmed some suspicions about things that we needed to do in the program. So I think that it was more positive than it was negative, even though there were times the time constraints really bothered me because of not being able to give adequate time to things that were going on."

The project affirmed Ray's commitment to changing the kind of staff development opportunities that have been available for Basic Skills staff.

"It was exciting, it was energizing, you were working on something that was of real interest to you as an individual. I think it motivated all the staff because I think that having the time to work on any kind of research or just spend time together, as a group, was very positive. In fact if I had my way, that's the way we'd do staff training all the time. I'd do it in clusters, where people would chose what they were interested in learning, provided that it wasn't something that - had no value nor meaning to the program. Because when we offer, what I

call canned training, then you're probably not going to hit more than 20% or 30% of the people who are there. And the rest of it is just, it's either too far over their head, or too far beneath where they are, and you spend that time and actually waste it for a large part of the people that you're trying to work with. So - and I've made a proposal for doing this several years ago."

"I think that some people worried, at first, just couldn't believe that we were going to do something like this, because it was so unlike anything that had ever been offered before. It was almost too good to be true. And some people may not have participated up front because of that. But I agree with you, I think probably all of us are saying some of the same things because we have some of the same concerns. I think it's going to be a great tool to evaluate the program with in lots of ways, if we take the data and as a group, sit down and look at it. I'm looking forward to hopefully taking it that step further.... I think that we can really make some positive changes here in the program, as far as training goes. And improve a lot of things, including morale."

"I think the other thing that I see, and Linda and I have talked about this a little, is that this to me would be a great tool to bring a new staff person into work with an older staff person that's been on for awhile, and let them do a project together. Because that way it eliminates a lot of the fear, they learn things a lot quicker than if you give them everything on a printed page and say this is what the scoop is.... I was thinking the other day, if we could do more of this and train new staff, especially, putting them with someone, for a longer period of time, I think we'd do a lot better job training the new person, and I'd think we'd reinforce and make the other staff person who's been here for awhile even stronger in doing that. I think that's, that to me, I've seen, is a very positive thing that's come out of this. And I personally think it is, to me right now, all of my - that's one of the best ways that you can train someone." [Dialogue Group meeting, 9/14/93]

It also reduced isolation, improving the working environment, according to Ray.

"Well I think they missed a great opportunity to mainly, get to know one another better, because that's the key, I think that every job, if people know one another, they feel better about each other, they know how one another acts and responds to certain things, it's just a better working environment. And if they didn't learn anything except something about the staff that they work with, it would've been well worth the time. I don't think you can make it mandatory, because I think it would defeat the purpose, but I would have liked to have seen more people participate in this."

Linda

Linda reflected on the impact of the Project regularly in meetings with Andy which were recorded. These recordings were transcribed and became the basis of her project. Although she did not attend the dialogue group meetings until near the end of the Project, she attended the workshops and

remained in touch with the participants' work through her everyday contacts with them. She also was interviewed by Hanna in September.

Linda's role and responsibilities involve management rather than classroom teaching and her concerns and observations reflected this. Most of her reflections were about the impact of the project on the staff as a whole and on the working of the department, which we have here termed organizational development.

She found that the Project had reduced the isolation of the staff, particularly because of the organized meetings, and fostered staff interaction. She has resolved to ensure that staff get together regularly in the future even though this is an expensive process.

> "One of the things that I liked about the staff interactions was that it seemed to reduce the isolation for the staff, the coming together seemed to reduce it. I don't know that all research projects would do that, but the fact that we have dialogues with them and at certain points, I thought was really good for them. And in terms of their actual research, they had communication and interactions with other people that ordinarily they would not, even some from other schools.... And I think it has made me more resolute to do more getting the staff together. What I've said to myself in the past was well, we just don't have the money to do that. And if you say you don't have the money, then you don't have the money. But I think that there just has to be money to do that, period. We're going to do that this year."

The staff met people from other schools and were able to see how their work compared with experience elsewhere.

> "I think interaction among the teachers is important. That's something they don't get enough of. But I think that you have to have interaction with the outside world, find out what's going on, or what the newest things are, or what they're trying to. And any kind of project we can do to get us out of this building, or you know, or out of what we're doing on a day to day basis."

Linda discovered that staff had skills she did not know about, enabling her to delegate more work, and simultaneously providing opportunities for the staff to broaden their experience. This in turn provided opportunities for staff to develop their careers, inside and outside the college.

> "Another thing, is we do a lot of grants, and so I had found a couple of staff, through this process, who I think would be capable of doing more of that, either the research part or the writing part, or the administration part that I hadn't realized before. So it brought forth some talents from staff that I would never have considered."

"I would think that for them personally, it might have given them some other ideas for things they could do, either in addition to teaching or outside of teaching. Which again, I always think that's healthy."

"There have been certain things in the past that it was just more efficient for me to do it. And I've been able to let go of some of that, through this project. But you're seeing, through the project, seeing people doing things and saying why - why am I doing this, you know. So I've been able to let go of some things, and I need to do more of that in the future. And one gal for example, it just never would have occurred to me to ask her to do something that I asked her to do, but through the project I saw that she had some skills and I went to her, I was the only one who knew, would you be interested in doing thus and such? And she said oh, I can't, I've never done that, I can't do it. And I said well on this project you're doing this, and in my view, that's the same thing, would you try it. She said yes.... She did a really good job.

To think that, that the program staff could put together, you know videotaping and then getting it evaluated and dealing with another school and all that kind of stuff was pretty amazing. You know, that was pretty complicated. The fact that in the dialogue groups they would have responsibility of putting together a meeting, I thought they did a good job of that. See, why should I take, hours of my time to plan staff meeting."

The Project fostered an understanding of the wider context in which the Department works, particularly the financial context.

"Another thing I think it did, again along the grant process, is that some of the individuals got a better handle on what goes on to keep some of this stuff funded. You know, when they have to actually do research and writing, and doing the project, I've had a couple of them comment to me that they had never done that before, they had no idea what it involved, but they had a new respect for that. I have had more people coming to me since we started this thing. We need to get money to do this, oh we need to get a grant to do this. That has not happened a lot in the past. People have just been more compartmentalized. This has helped them to generalize."

She found it to be a good experience for the staff, and that stimulated staff led to stimulated and successful students.

"Getting back to the question that you asked me about how does that help in the classroom - I think a stimulated teacher stimulates students. And I think that one of the biggest enemies we have in adult education here is complacency. Because you know, we have things sort of neatly arranged where we have certain people are recruiting and certain people are testing, and certain people are teaching. And that's real efficient to do what we have to do, and the numbers we have to produce, but it's not real efficient when it comes to looking at other options and research and stimulation. So anyway, I thought part of my job is getting the staff exposed to more things, and for the purpose of stimulating them, to then stimulate the students, and talk about other things. Because whatever they're involved in, they're going to discuss with their students. As far as we can tell from the self report records that we have from students, about 300 of our students went into curriculum last year. And I have no other statistics,

but my guess is that's one of the highest percentages in the state. And, so here's my point. We have tried to stimulate the teacher to make this an issue in the classroom, from the get go. Even though you're not reading at the third grade level right now, we are going to work with you if you will stick with us, here's where you can go if you want to. If all you want to do is learn to read, that's fine with us. But we want you to know the range of options that you have. So that's been part of our activity. And I don't think you could tell a student that they can beyond what they think they can go beyond unless you're trying to do that yourself."

The Project provided an opportunity for team work to develop, a crucial piece of the longer term agenda required by new management styles.

"The new forms of leadership that we hear about are not at all the structure that we're living under. And here I have to live under this Christmas tree pyramid that's really narrow at the top, and yet I know that the way of the future and the way to go is this team management concept. So it is not only painful now, but it's going to be even more painful in the future. I'm dealing with it as quickly as I can, but it's hard, because that's not the system I grew up under. I see my job is getting the job done. But now, you know, I have staff going to these lectures on quality teams and I'm going to these lectures, and we're listening to that and we're trying some other ways to sort of change the landscape and look at things differently. I'm giving up a lot of control.... The task orientation has been overwhelming, and what I see in the future is that things probably, with the new system, are going to take longer, they're going to be more complex, people are going to have more influence.... Unless [teachers] know each other better, they can't be a team, and they're so isolated that we have to do something to make that happen."

And the Project offered Linda an opportunity to reflect in a structured way on her own work.

"Having an ongoing meeting of some sort would bring me back to focus .... Because otherwise I would be distracted by other things, so that was good. You know, I thought it was a good process and I thought it was productive. One of the meetings that we had for example, I think Andy, before the meeting, like at the end of each meeting we would talk about what the topic might be for the next meeting - you know, I want you to think about what kind of thing you might do in the future, or how, if you're going to continue, and by the time he came back, I realized that there were ways we could do that. I didn't necessarily have to take an hour to write something down or anything like that, but I mean - by focusing on what I might think about for the next time helped, and he did organize it to that extent. I have, you know, a 30 minute drive each way, going and coming. Well see there's no phone, there's no interruptions. What would happen is you know, Andy would come and visit and we would have our talk. Well then after that I would have going home time to reflect on that, what we just talked about. I really don't know how I'm going to do it in the future, perhaps I will do it with some staff. I don't know. But I will think about that. I will try to find a way of - but I will say this. Having a focus for my reflection was more meaningful that just reflecting."

Linda also thought the experience sufficiently valuable to continue in future years.

> "I would never have thought of making this a local project for which we ask the Foundation for funds. Now I think that we're going to make this sort of an ongoing thing and do that, but you know, that was, that was a surprise to even me, and I thought of it, but I think we're going to do that." [Linda interview with Hanna, 9/7/93]

> "Something that Ray and I have discussed and in fact we're going to do here, is to have a menu of activities for staff, that they can select from as staff development activities. And what we would like to do is to include research of the type that we've done here as one of those choices, so that you know, once choice maybe that you'd want to go one conference a year, one choice maybe that you'd want to go to a conference of your choosing not our choosing, you know, that's for a different organization than we would affiliate with, you know, but we would like to have a - maybe a choice of 10 things that each person can choose from, but they have to choose it and they have to plan it, and they have to accomplish it as their own development activity. So we were talking about including this self-driven research or something, teacher-generated, self-directed or something. But we're going to call it research because that's what it is, and I don't think that we're going to be able to dress it up any better than that. But my thought is that for certain people that don't want to do that, they can do something else. They can sit and listen to some sort of development, that there are people, and maybe some in this group, that would prefer to do this, other than go and sit and listen at a conference or something. So we would like to make this one of the choices in the future." [Dialogue Group meeting, 9/14/93]

> "The other thing that we talked about a time or two is the possibility of funding this as an ongoing activity. And I had mentioned... the fact that I think we can get funds from the foundation to make awards to people.... And we may try a couple times and see if we get any responses to it. I think that there is a natural fear for the word research, I think Angela is right. But I also think that this is a professional staff, they're going to have to get over it. (laughter) And I think that our doing and your doing what you've done in this project should go along way to relieve some of those fears. I mean I think your PR and what we do on October the 1st, is something real important. because we're going to have an audience of people that did not participate." [Dialogue Group meeting, 9/14/93]

At the workshop in October, Linda shared her overall assessment of the Project with the group.

> "I want to read to you the six reasons that I agreed for us to go into [this project], and I think it's really interesting in light of what we discussed today. Here are the reasons: 1. This grant gave us some extra money for an activity with great potential for staff involvement and development; 2. I felt this could reduce the isolation felt by literacy staff who are all part-time, hourly paid, and who work day and/or night at over 20 different locations and who have only two or three opportunities a year to get together; 3. I felt this project, that these project activities would allow staff a stimulating change from their daily

activities, which are among the most overwhelming and stressing in education, to teach a room full of usually 10 or more adults who are all at different learning levels, from first to twelfth grade level, and who desire education in no less then five to ten subjects, oh yes, and we don't pay for preparation time; 4. I feel that change is the only constant in adult education. Any project which causes staff to rethink or rework is valuable. We cannot be stagnant, we must learn and grow. I will always stimulate growth and change in anyway possible. 5. We have precious little staff development in literacy programs, and so forth. 6. Total quality management and team building are currently two very popular training topics in industry training. Our school's continuing education department does this training daily. I feel we must practice what we preach. (laughter) Anyway, those are the reasons we went into the project. And it sounds to me like, from what I've heard today, that, that it did accomplish a lot of those." [Workshop, 10/1/93]

Work at PPP

Roni

Roni was interviewed by Pearl in March. However, she later dropped out of the work and was not reinterviewed.

Roni saw the Project as important because it offered a chance to reflect and to provide a structure for thinking about PPP's literacy work.

"It helps me maintain a focus I think that I may have not had before because I was just sort of doing stuff, and we do more than most staffs, I mean we do you know, a day a month, and then a week a year to just look at stuff. But what I'm finding in doing this that you know, that looks at all our work for a day a month or a week a year. But for us to just be looking at that piece that's tied into our literacy for time, that's a new piece."

Billy

Billy was interviewed by Pearl in March and October. The Project helped Billy develop useful insights into his work.

"It's changed the way I look at the work. It's changed the way that I sort of assess the work. Before I just sort of did stuff, you know, before I went into this project, wasn't really paying attention to what was working and why it was working, just sort of if, it worked, I sort of knew it. And if it didn't, didn't do it again. What this process has allowed me to do is see some of the reasons behind why it's working and how to evaluate it and how to get a handle on duplicating that which is working and that which is not working."

Billy began asking new questions about his work.

"How it is that people ah, the process that people go through in getting information about what it is that we're doing. More about the process that

people go through - hearing information in a way that relates to folks' lives. You know, hearing information, when you're talking about larger issues like NAFTA and stuff like that, why people hear certain things and they don't hear other things. Like if you say the same thing three of four times, why it takes some people three times, one person, some people one time and stuff like that. The process being when it touches somebody, when it means something to somebody, then they understand it. And until that happens, people don't usually get the information."

The Project raised important questions about assumptions the staff made about the community.

"Probably on some level had thought about it and knew something about it, and did not have language for it, and did not really take time to look at it, you know, through this process, 'cause I'm just, as an organizer, I'm so busy doing it, I don't take the time to evaluate the work. Learned a lot of stuff, they got sort of a new understanding of what people understand. A lot of the leadership thought oh, well everyone knows what's going on, they're this, they're this, the reason they're not coming to meetings is they're not interested. When they went back, and went door to door and asked people, you know, why, what is it you know about what we're doing in this community, how has it you know, affected your lives. Would you like to see changes and stuff like that - they learned a lot about that. And when we sat down and talked about the importance of doing that kind of work, and finding out why people come to meetings and why they don't come to meetings, what they're hearing in meetings and what they're not hearing in meetings. When we looked at that type of critical thinking, about why people are involved and why they're not, the people who are going through that process came away with a new understanding about what people are getting, and that you have to pay attention to it, it's not just a given, that if you say something, if you go over something and you tell somebody about something, that they're going to understand it at the same level that everyone else does. They're at different levels of understanding, in any community."

He was able to develop a critical understanding of the processes involved in communicating information.

"There is a pattern to what sometimes seems like a totally random event. That there is a basic pattern to the way that people pick up information. And if you can, you certainly can't duplicate anything when you're doing organizing because there's so many variables, but if you can hold onto to some basic concepts about how people learn and what works for folks in this type of situation, what I've learned, there's some tools to look at those and evaluate them. So that's probably been the most important thing that's come out of it, just that understanding."

Liz

Liz was interviewed by Pearl in March and October.

Liz's goals were focused around developing the organization's literacy work.

> "Even more importantly than having a written result of this project or something to look at, but to have - well to have the study groups growing and being successful and being, you know, markedly more successful in terms of you know, people participating in what we're doing, you know, what projects, you know, what events, you know what the folks are doing in the class. And hopefully so that, and things that'll be able to like move along and succeed at a faster pace. Not that speed is the most important thing, but to move along maybe quicker than this one was getting started. Just because this was sort of a - this was our starter group. The ESL will be a starter group in and of itself, which you know, but as far as the other study group and hopefully you know, starting other groups after that."

The Project gave them an opportunity to reflect on their work together, and to affirm where they were working well.

> "I get so much excitement and good feelings and wonderful stuff out of the study group for myself because I see what we're all doing together and I see all these wonderful things happening. But I also, I get real frustrated too. Sometimes I just get really gosh, am I doing this right, is this - are we doing this right, you know, are we really, how can we be calling ourselves a literacy class, if we're not teaching GEDs and they're not getting their grammar any better, or whatever. So I'm kind of back and forth on that, I get kind of caught up in the technique and the stuff, but I also know that we're not a regular down at the library tutoring session of getting the grammar right. But it's happening as it goes, it's a slower process in one way, but it's more thorough it feels like, it's much more. Because what people are coming out of this group with is just exciting you know. People that never would talk out are starting to talk out and I think that's just so exciting, because in my life I grew up a very quiet shy person and I'm still working on finding my voice and capital V voice, and speaking out on what I know and what I feel. It's easier for me personally to talk about what I feel than what I know. And for a lot of other people it's the other way around, but just to talk about it and to own it and everything. It's like I've been in the process of doing that and still am, and it's a really hard challenging road but it's so exciting to be a part of having an environment that people can do that, and start, and do it together with a group of people instead of just by yourself. So that's just - it's just really inspiring. I just feel like gosh, I'm going to stick with this organization for awhile because I want to see this project through and maybe there's a little ego involved there, but I think we all have ego. But it's just - I don't know it just feels like a really, it just - it's the most exciting thing I can think of that I can be doing right now with my life."

The Project provided an opportunity for critical reflection on their work.

> "I think it has showed me in a more defined way, concerns I've had, as well as bringing to light concerns about are we truly member run, are we walking our talk, that kind of thing, that I'd been questioning at the beginning of the process and then a lot of ways I've been questioning a lot of the time that I've been with this organization. And so not just to put it all on PPP, but am I

> walking my talk in my work, whether it's PPP or whatever. Are we, am I, walking our talk, are we naming it as it is, what the situation is, what we're doing, and are we doing what we're naming? So I think it's made it more clear and also it has helped to - as we've all come together and looking at this stuff, in addition to really questioning that, also has shown that there are real reasons why we haven't, and it's not all simply because we've been slack and taking, keeping the power in the staff or all the things that can be seen as negative reasons, or negative things about saying one thing, and not doing it, or the staff controlling everything, or there's real negative things about that that I struggle with but it's, this has also shown that there are things that are, real things about real aspects of why we're not as member run as the ideal as we might like to be."

Liz sees the Project as holding up a mirror for the organization to examine its work and plan from there.

> "Whether it's taking it to the rest of the staff and taking it to the board of directors, taking it to the study group, taking it to the membership in general, whatever way we chose to do that, we'll at least be taking it to the staff and to the board, which I think are, in a lot of ways, the biggest, I hate to say it, but barriers to doing this sometimes. I mean we end up being our own barriers a lot of times, to doing stuff, that, maybe because we're caught up in all of the work or we're all driving ourselves off a cliff in business and craziness, and got to get everything done, we've got to save the world right now, that kind of frantic pace of stuff that if we're able to like at the staff retreat or at the board meeting in December, to be able to have a presentation to show that this is what our conclusions are or what we've found or what we've looked at, is that we are not doing this as much as we say we are or would like to be or need to be or ought to be. And this how we can, move towards that or continue to move towards that. And I think it's just an opportunity for this to be a real mirror or something to our work. For us to be able to put up in front of the staff or the board or whoever and say this is what's going on, does this look good, is this what we want to be doing, how can we change it, or let's change it or we need to change it. 'Cause there's some real - there's a lot of stuff that's coming up on the staff and there always has been, I think that's where a continually evolving changing group and growing, and right now we're really looking at some stuff that's easy to ignore."

Cheryl

Cheryl was interviewed by Pearl in October. She had not been heavily involved in the Project at the beginning, but became steadily more engaged as it continued.

Cheryl learned about documentation and now documents her work more systematically.

> "Well, I've certainly started thinking about it in terms of keeping a written history of what's going on, the whole process, not just the literacy piece, but the healthcare piece, whatever. It's good to be able to have something to reflect

back 5, 10 years from now on a process that happened, who were the people involved, so I keep better notes, better dates, better information of who was present. And that's something I've continued to do for all my meetings, on my list printout I write out who all was there, rather than relying on memory. Because I may get hit by a truck, I may leave. I may get amnesia. So what has changed is my documentation and all the work that I do overall."

The Project also had an impact of her perception of language, and its relation to people and power.

"I have changed my own personal philosophy. It has certainly reinforced that people have a lot to say, it may not be spelled correctly, and it may not be written you know, in formal English, but it's still just as powerful, and sometimes even more powerful, when someone is talking from their own voice, in their own language, with their own little nuances and the way they pronounce words. It's a flavor to a local colloquial type of communication that's wonderful. And I have an appreciation for that that I didn't have, prior to this, to the start of this project, so I have moved from a rigid, staunch, anal, stoical place, to one of being more free, more better educated myself about the whole process of communicating in language, what's important and what's not important. So my priorities are different. And I think that's a growth on my part, to not be so rigid and so formal in my own ways of talking and being with people. We have a more relaxed, playful sense of humor type of encounter that really frees people up to joke, if they need to joke, or to laugh if they need to laugh. Rather than you know, Cheryl's here, we've got to be serious. So I'm not as serious.

It has really given me a different perspective on how to be in this world and how to be tolerant and how to do exactly what I say that I do as a person, I take people where they are. If it's where they are that they can't conjugate the verb to be, then I have to walk my talk and be able to do that, without going like this, to stop from correcting somebody. Because it's embarrassing to try to correct somebody. And I used to correct my son, I don't even do that anymore."

Cheryl agrees with Liz about the major organizational implications of their project.

"One way that I see it's going to happen is that it should be accessible to certain people on the Board, on the staff, and in the membership, just as a process or a project that we've been involved in, then we need to share information that we've learned. Now what has come out of this, we say that we claim to be, member generated, member run, member whatever, and what this really points out is the staff still has lots of control and we still aren't doing that and yes we are leaning toward, but this is a reality and if we're going to be who we say we are representing what we say we represent, then our agendas have to be put aside, and the agendas of the people need to be in the forefront. Now however that conflicts with organizational agenda, in terms of PPP's mission and why we were started, where we were started, and who our constituency is, that can be, that's dialogue to happen, but the point is, I think that there's too much control from the top down. And I think that there are reasons for those controlling and it's been valid, but it's no longer valid and we have moved to a position where we are much stronger and much more powerful

> in the community, and therefore we can trust to let things, pieces go and let members pick them up. I think that's our lesson, our learning place out of all of this, this whole project, is members need to take more control, more leadership in the organization. The most important thing, no, it can't be the most, yet it can, the most important thing came out of this whole project for me, is facing the music that staff is leading too much and controlling too much and that I kind of, I know what that's about, and I know that I need to let go of my own personal pieces of needing to shake and mold"

Summary of Issues and Findings

We cannot really tell the impact and the long-term effects of this Project at this time. Therefore, findings about staff development at this point are about the reported experience and immediate learning gained from the Project, and about intentions to make changes in ways of working. Additionally, a number of areas in which the participants might have the opportunity to share their work and gain feedback were pending when the Project finished.

Staff Development

The participants reported that the Project did not have an immediate impact on classroom practice in most cases, although it did have a great impact on their personal insight, and provided insights which might change the way they approach future teaching.

- The project provided an opportunity for reflection on their work, and to deepen their critical understanding of their work, and of participatory literacy.
- It provided an opportunity to see the effect and impact of their work.
- In some cases it also provided validation for their work.
- The participants gained a deeper understanding of the students with which they worked, of personal issues which impacted on their lives as well as awareness of their attitudes and interests.
- The experience of working on their research pieces deepened the relationship and level of trust of participants and students.
- The Project provided a structure for working on a goal connected with their work for several participants.
- It also allowed some of them to work on frustrations they experienced in teaching.

Participants gained a deeper, more complex understanding of:

- participatory literacy education;
- the effect and impact of their work;
- the students with whom they work -- the personal issues which impact on their lives as well as awareness of their attitudes and interests; and
- research and the relationship between practitioner research and staff development.

In some cases, the Project provided validation for participants' work, and it helped to deepen the level of trust and communication between participants and their students. The Project also provided participants with a mechanism for exploring some of the frustrations they were experiencing in their work.

The Project **provided valuable time** and context and structure in which:

- The (normally isolated) participants could meet.
- The participants could interact and learn from each other.
- They could share ideas.
- The participants could practice team work and other linked skills (such as group facilitation), experience working as a unit.
- They could develop self-awareness and sensitivity in dealing with colleagues.
- They could meet colleagues in other organizations.

It also provided time for the participants to **work on issues that were important to them**, in a way which they found meaningful. It provided some of them with research experience that they wanted.

The Project led to the **development of greater confidence**, in their teaching and in their ability to execute difficult projects, on the part of the participants.

- The research enabled some of the participants to work at a greater level of comfort and confidence as their understanding was now grounded in research they had conducted themselves.
- It developed their awareness of what could be achieved by teachers and other practitioners, if given the opportunity, resources and support.
- It provided them with a basis for communication about their work with colleagues.

Many of the participants were already reflecting on their work; that was part of the motivation for becoming involved in the Project. The Project **provided an opportunity to consolidate previous knowledge, experience participatory methods** - especially through the participatory method employed in the Project, and plan work that would **extend the approach further**.

Most of the participants thought this should be an on-going and continuing process.

Organizational Development

Many of the participants' projects contributed to organizational development as well as to individual growth and learning. Workshops and dialogue groups provided opportunities for the staff at ACC to get to know each other better, to share information and ideas with each other and to decrease their sense of isolation. In effect, these structures were staff development mechanisms as well as supporting the research process. The administrators who were involved from ACC observed the positive impact these meetings had on the larger organization, and, as a result, they are recommending that dialogue groups - opportunities for staff to come together to talk about their work - be continued as a staff development practice. In addition, they support continuing practitioner research projects.

The major findings of the PPP staff direct the organization to re-examine the role of members in controlling the organization's work. This is a central organizational development issue, and it emerges directly from this research project. The staff also became more comfortable talking about their work and analyzing their approaches; they have an increased articulateness about their work and they are bringing their concerns to the board and the members.

CHAPTER 11

THE RESEARCH ACTIVITY: LESSONS LEARNED[1]

The purpose of this Chapter is to reflect on practitioner research as an activity and to identify lessons that the Literacy South staff has learned from this Project. It places this Project in the context of other work in practitioner research and staff development. It looks at the process of conducting practitioner research and highlights what worked well, what didn't work well in this case, and what we will do differently when we engage in another practitioner research project.

Adult Learning and Staff Development

There are numerous theories of adult learning, ranging from behaviorism to humanistic and social context models. Cognitive science has emerged in the last two decades to bring together social and behavioral scientists across differing models of learning. Cognitive scientists find that cognition and knowledge cannot be separated (see Sticht and McDonald, 1989, for an overview of cognitive research supporting this position). This means that how we think and learn (cognition) cannot be separated from what we know and what we are trying to learn (knowledge). In other words, it is easier to learn something new when we can relate it to what we already know; it is easier to use new knowledge when we have learned it in a way that relates to how we want to use it.

Therefore, the pedagogy implied by cognitive science is based on learners' strengths. Teaching and learning should start with learners' existing cognitive structures that reflect their life experiences and use those as a foundation upon which to build new skills and knowledge. Staff development, if approached as an opportunity for adult learning, should be consistent with cognitive science. Teachers' existing knowledge should be respected and teachers must play a central role as the agents of their own learning.

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[1]Portions of this chapter are adapted from Fingeret, H., and Cockley, S. (1992) *Teachers Learning: An Evaluation of ABE Staff Development in Virginia.* Dayton, VA: The Virginia Adult Educator's Research Network.

Conceptualizations of Staff Development

There are competing schools of philosophy about the purposes, processes and power relationships of staff development in the K-12 literature, but these are much less evident in the staff development literature relating to adult literacy education. The underlying philosophy for staff development is treated as unproblematic in adult literacy education. Discussions of effective staff development practices usually are not placed in the larger framework of program change and increased system effectiveness; nor are they placed in relation to a larger analysis of the role of teachers' knowledge or the power relations that underlie the decision making processes about staff development needs and structures.

Adult literacy staff development traditionally has been approached in ways that are similar to seeing literacy as a set of skills; teacher preparation has been viewed as the accumulation of a sufficiently large "bag of tricks, " regardless of programmatic context, and staff development has been viewed as a remediation process in which teachers' skills and knowledge are assessed, gaps identified, and experts called in to fill in the holes.

An alternative model of staff development has been developing in the last decade, mirroring literacy education's concerns with practices, critical reflection and action. In this model teachers' experience and knowledge are valued and provide the base for continuing inquiry, learning and action (Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1992). This inquiry-based model of staff development uses teacher research as one of its central activities (Lytle, Belzer and Reumann). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) use the following definition of teacher research: "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 24). They explain:

> By systematic we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. Systematic also refers to ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analyzing classroom events for which there may be only partial or unwritten records. By intentional we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous, although we do not mean to suggest that important insights about teaching are generated only when planned.... By inquiry, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences -- to adopt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life. (p. 24)

Alice Lytle, at the National Center for Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, has been working with a group of graduate students and literacy practitioners to adapt the teacher research/inquiry model for adult literacy education (See Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann, 1992; 1993). Lytle has moved from using the language of "teacher research" to "practitioner research" to reflect adult literacy workers' wide range of roles and responsibilities.

Outcomes of Practitioner Research

The goal of teacher research is not just to conduct research; teacher researchers are committed to solving problems and developing insight into the questions and problems that emerge in their own practice. Practitioner research offers an opportunity for an "insider" view of literacy education in which practitioners develop a new relationship to their own knowledge (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993).

There is a range of possible outcomes from participation in teacher research. Goswami and Stillman (1987, cited in Gomez, 1988) identify six potential positive outcomes of teacher inquiry:

> 1. Their teaching is transformed.... They become theorists articulating their intentions, testing their assumptions, and finding connections with practice.
>
> 2. Their perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers are transformed. They step up their use of resources; they form networks; and they become more active professionally.
>
> 3. They become rich resources who can provide the profession with information it simply doesn't have.... Teachers know their classrooms and students in ways that outsiders can't.
>
> 4. They become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, less apt to accept uncritically others' theories, less vulnerable to fads, and more authoritative in their assessment of curricula and materials.
>
> 5. They can study writing and learning and report their findings without spending large sums of money (although they must have support and recognition)....
>
> 6. They collaborate with their students to answer questions important to both, drawing on community resources in new and unexpected ways. The nature of teacher-student relations changes when inquiry begins. Working with teachers to answer real questions increases students' motivation to talk, read, and write

> and has the potential for helping them achieve mature language skills. (pp. 19-20)

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) affirm the importance of teacher research for contributing to the knowledge base about teaching and for staff development. They add that teacher research also can contribute to school reform.

Staff Development Outcomes of this Project

The staff development outcomes described in this Project are consistent with those found in the literature (see, for example, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Fingeret and Pates, 1992; Goswami and Stillman, 1987). Many of the participants in this Project describe how their way of thinking about their work has changed, and how their intentions about future work incorporate their learning from this Project. Participants' perceptions of themselves as writers, teachers and *researchers* have changed through their involvement. In addition, they have formed networks that support their continued learning.

Many of the participants described the way that their participation has enhanced their sense of confidence. Some participants' projects helped them consolidate their knowledge, while others developed a deeper understanding of their work or new insights that are reflected in a sense of power in relation to their roles as practitioners. Some projects led to a deeper philosophical understanding of participatory curriculum development and learner centered instruction. Everyone emerged from this project knowing that they can do it.

Some of the participants' projects have the potential to add important new insights to our knowledge base in adult literacy education. For example, Bridget's project investigating the process of participatory curriculum development raises essential questions about the focus of workplace literacy education curriculum. John's project raises difficult issues about the outcomes of investing public funds in educational programs for adults with developmental disabilities. Ray and Michelle's project provides some useful insights into the impact of staff holding different definitions for specific terms such as "learner centered." The projects also raise deeper questions about the nature of the "knowledge base," though. Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1993) explain:

> Generic solutions to problems in adult literacy are inadequate for the range of contexts and constraints; therefore, rethinking practitioners' relationships to knowledge generation and use is critical. Practitioner research enfranchises teachers, tutors, and administrators as knowledge makers. The questions posed in this set of inquiry projects are at once unique and somewhat universal; their processes and outcomes... can stimulate a deeper and more widespread dialogue among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in the field. This dialogue problematizes the notion of a knowledge base for practice by bringing practitioners into the conversation about what counts as knowledge in the field. (p. 33)

Therefore, as practitioners move into roles as generators of knowledge, the knowledge base becomes more dynamic, complex and responsive; practitioner researchers not only contribute to the knowledge base but they redefine our conception of a knowledge base.

Program Development Outcomes

Many authors who discuss public school staff development have moved from focusing on individual teacher improvement to a focus on larger structures -- schools or districts. The connection between individual teachers and schools is much more tenuous in adult literacy however; indeed, in many settings one would speak of relationships between teachers and communities or community organizations rather than schools, *per se*. The adult literacy program as an overall environment in which learning and teaching take place is much more invisible in the adult literacy staff development literature than in public school discussions. The link between staff development and program development (or, in the terms used by public school authors, school reform) is important; the program's culture affects teachers' orientation to their own ongoing learning.

Many of the participants in this Project include recommendations for program development as part of their projects. These vary from Marion's extensive analysis of the relationship between support staff and teachers, with recommendations for change, to Bridget's recommendations about the process and focus for curriculum development in workplace literacy education, to PPP's recommendations for analyzing the relationship between their organization and their membership. All of the participants asked questions that concerned their concrete situations; as a result, all of their

projects, in one way or another, bear on the larger program within which they are situated.

At ACC, each participant worked individually from the start, choosing research questions that were grounded in their experience. The Basic Skills director tried to facilitate their involvement but did not attempt to influence their choices or their projects. At the end of the Project it was clear that their **individual projects contributed to the overall organization as well as to their practice as teachers or administrators**. This connection happened quite naturally.

> "I guess if I find out when I do the research that you know, what if, if what I am doing is absolutely of no value to a person or to the industry, well then I'd be rather dumb not to change something, you know, I mean, the purpose of me being there is to make sure that their goals are met. And if I find out that their goals are not being met... then we'll take a different path." [Ann interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

The choice was not just relevant to their work, but included consideration of the needs of the college and the funders as well:

> "I am looking at the impact that workplace literacy classes have on students, on the people that are in the class. One of the purposes of workplace literacy classes of course is to make or to try to develop the person into a more aware or a better employee. But the other aspect of it is to just to reach their goals or help them to reach their goals and their goals aren't always so that they will just be a better employee at that particular company. Any time people come into these classes and learn something, you cannot pigeon hole it and say I'm going to be a better employee because of this. It affects their whole life. So I want to just see how these classes affect them on the job as well as in their life you know. So that's what I'm doing. I guess one of the reasons I felt like that I could handle it was that this was a topic that I was interested in anyway, as far as the grant was concerned. 'Cause we're always trying to evaluate you know, how are these classes helping the students? And we have to look at it from the point of view of the student and also from the industry point of view. You know, they're paying big bucks for us to be in there and they're expecting results also. So, I'm constantly look at it to see how what we do in the classroom, how it is affecting these people. Are they better employees or how are they changing as a result of that class." [Ann interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

Everyone addressed implications for work at ACC in their final reports, reflecting the staff's commitment to the organization and their concern about the quality and effectiveness of their own work.

PPP is much smaller and everyone is involved in decision making. The staff are all personally involved in the ideas which PPP represents and these

permeate all their activity. It is therefore not surprising that the staff worked on issues to do with the effectiveness of the organization's work by examining individuals' work. It should be noted, however, that participants from both organizations contributed to organizational development, even though the organizations are quite different.

Administrators and Change

Since the focus in most staff development is on teacher change rather than placing teachers in the context of their programs and communities, staff development remains almost exclusively focused on teachers. Administrators, however, play an important role in creating a climate supportive of growth and learning, providing resources that enable teachers' participation in staff development activities, and providing leadership for particular approaches to literacy education in their programs (Pelavin Associates, 1991).

Most importantly, though, is that administrators make a commitment to their own ongoing professional development; administrators' knowledge, like that of teachers, needs to be respected and explored through a number of processes that help administrators come together as a community as well as find their niche in the community of the program -- with teachers, students, and community members.

This project included administrators at both sites. Their learning and development have been enhanced by participation in their own projects. It is important to note, therefore, that **practitioner research is an effective mechanism for administrators' development as well as teachers' development.**

Literacy South's previous practitioner research project involved administrators in much more tangential ways such as signing off on a form acknowledging their teachers' participation in a project, or attending an introductory meeting about the process. This Project involved administrators much more deeply in the process as they conducted their own projects. This **direct involvement seems to be connected to administrators' support for practitioner research** as an ongoing process in their programs.

A Practitioner Research Project as Participatory Education

Most of the incidental outcomes of practitioner research are the result of participants struggling with the process of engaging in research -- reflecting on their work to identify their questions, making difficult choices about design, engaging with others in thinking about their own learning, struggling with writing, and working to define the limits of their projects and its relationship to their practice. In this way, practitioner research as we practiced it in this Project and as it is described in the literature, is a participatory approach to staff development. It engages the learner -- in this case, the staff person -- in conducting their own learning activities, making decisions about the goals, the process and the anticipated outcomes. The practitioners are in control of their own learning, and their projects build on their prior experience and respond to their situations.

This implies that **the impact of a practitioner research project can be enhanced if it is conducted as a model of participatory education**. It has to provide enough structure to respond to participants' anxiety and to help practitioners move forward. At the same time, it has to provide the flexibility and freedom that is necessary for practitioners to take charge of their own work. Thus, the Project staff were continually struggling with issues such as limits, control, and authority. Particularly at the beginning of the project, we felt that the participants wanted more direction than we were willing to provide within the framework of participatory education. Some participants understood the process and its relationship to instruction, and commented on it:

> "I thought it was a very positive experience, I've enjoyed it. I think it's been a good experience in the sense that it's been a struggle too because I think a lot of people don't realize that a part of the thing of doing participatory is the struggle. It's like I said at the beginning, when we were talking about this month's ago now. It's like going on a vacation, and most people don't enjoy the trip back and forth, their sole focus is on the place where they're going to. And if you focus on nothing except where you're going to, you're missing at least three fourths of the vacation." [Ray interview with Pearl, 9/7/93]

> "Maybe research... has to do with thinking about a subject that you want to research and coming in - hopefully coming to it somewhat with an open mind, and then saying you know, what does this say at the end of it.... I think there's some good things about what you all are doing in terms of you know, not wanting to give us too much because when you give somebody too much, it has the tendency to do it for them, complete it for them, and I can respect that because

none of us are, none of us are professionals in this field of research, and none of us really in a sense know what we're doing. We're kind of just grasping at straws and trying to come to conclusions. And I think, for us having to flesh it out ourselves and having to do it ourselves, we come, we find out things about what we do and don't know and about our assumptions and about ourselves. Whereas if you just say okay, here's the formal and do it this way, one step, two three, I mean, what's the purpose of having this whole thing." [John interview with Pearl, 5/14/93]

And I can appreciate you know, the content of what you all are trying to do which is basically, okay, you have this thing to do now, let's talk about how we're going to do that as a group and work these things out between ourselves. And of course what you're doing, once again like you said, there's mirroring kinds of things we can do as a teacher to be more learner-centered and to get more input from my students on what they need and what they don't need. And I've heard them say so many times well, what do you want to do or what do you think? Or, what's good for you? You know, and so that has its merits. Although we're used to the other way around which a teacher or administrator saying you do this and do so many hours of this and that's your job and you do it. This way we find out that we start questioning what we're doing and what the reasons for doing it. I expected here you do this, and here's what you do, and go do it. And instead it's what do you think you should be doing? Or the steps that you feel comfortable doing? What is it you're trying to learn from doing all this, and really questioning traditional roles of instructor-learner and learner-instructor, and how, you know, how we go about learning things and doing things, which is normally I'm up here, you're down here, yeah." [John]

Billy: So the process of not having something we're working for was kind of new to me. But that felt kind of different and kind of unstable, not having something we're working towards, and just being whatever we created was what we create. Which I guess is the value of research.

Pearl: Yeah. And then how did you resolve that, to just understand?

Billy: Just staying with it.... And just realizing, wait a minute, I'm not accustomed to this process, but it worked.... [Not] spending too much time wondering what it was going to look like and paying attention to process, because, I guess what this is all about is process.

Pearl: Would you do it again?

Billy: Oh yeah.

Previous Work as a Foundation for this Project

Continuity of practitioner research projects from year to year facilitates the development of a practitioner research culture. It provides familiarity with the idea of practitioners engaging in research and offers examples and models which practitioners can refer to when becoming engaged in the research process. This continuity is nonetheless frequently absent, partly

because many practitioner research projects are currently funded by grants and limited by the time span of the grant, rather than being embedded in regular staff development budgets.

In this Project however, a variant of that model is visible. The practitioner research project created continuity for previous work -- not a research project, but work grounded in the same philosophical approach to literacy education. This wasn't all positive. The multiplicity of different activities with Literacy South contributed to the initial uncertainty experienced by some participants.

Some of the participants consciously engaged in a project which would allow them to explore participatory learning more deeply. Other participants found their understanding of participatory literacy enhanced by the process of taking responsibility for and engaging in their own learning.

> "It was reinforcement. And I think what it did for me was it - I think it helped reinforce and sort of solidify all the concepts." [Bridget interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

In particular, engaging in the process of organizing their learning contributed strongly to this reinforcement.

> "I thoroughly enjoyed it, it was just that I was constantly kind of pulled between the conflict of spending the time doing that, versus doing all the other stuff that had to happen. And one of the things, the reason that that happened is because we had so many changes taking place, additional programs, industry and different kinds of things taking place, and going on at the time, that made it worse than it really was. I don't view that as a negative, I view it was I think a part of the struggle that goes on when you try to do participatory - I think that's a part - it takes a longer time, it's a more involved process. And I already knew that - I think this experience confirmed that, even to a greater degree, and made me more aware of why, unless you're really committed to the philosophy of doing something participatory, you're going to throw it out the window unless people do, because of the time and the extra effort that's required in order to work with other people. 'Cause I could have just made a lot of decisions on my own, without involving, we actually ended up involving about 20 people. I think the positive side of it was that working with - of course with the other staffers and with Michelle, and working with the additional teachers, and with the students doing the video, doing the focus groups, getting a lot of feedback, that we learned a great deal and confirmed some suspicions about things that we needed to do in the program." [Ray interview with Pearl, 9/7/93]

Uncertainty and Anxiety

Uncertainty (from not **knowing** what to do) and anxiety (from **feeling** badly about uncertainty) existed in the Project both for the Project staff, who did not know what the practitioners would do, and for the practitioners, especially since they had not engaged in such work previously. We found that uncertainty and anxiety could be diminished by providing clear information about expectations, and by making sure that there were numerous opportunities for participants to share their experiences with each other and to talk to Literacy South staff. Although we wanted to help participants relax about their work, we came to understand that **a certain amount of uncertainty was necessary and a certain amount of anxiety was probably inevitable.**

These issues are consistent with the literature. For example, Santos (1989) documents one particular project in which practitioners' inexperience in qualitative and collaborative research leads to problems stemming from,

> "The feeling of uncertainty, of not participating in a project that was laid out rationally in advance with perfectly defined steps and ready tools." (p. 579)

He also explains that,

> "The group suffered occasionally from the impression of not gaining ground, of using tools and concepts that were too loose, of taking too long to arrive at conclusions and action plans." (p. 579)

Each mechanism in this project (such as a meeting of two organizations or a dialogue group) was developed to respond to specific situations and needs. For example, we found that group meetings paced the project and provided technical assistance with issues common to everyone. Dialogue group meetings created time for reflection and sharing and reflected everyone's individual agendas. Both types of meetings provided opportunities for practitioners to assert their knowledge. Individual sessions with Andy were a chance to get technical assistance with specific research issues. Group dialogue journals were a response to problems setting up a meeting at PPP; they provided an alternative way of communicating.

A two-day workshop had been planned as a starting point in the original proposal, but was changed because of time constraints. Linda at ACC commented on the need for such a process in her reflections:

> "If we were going to do this all over, what I envision would be an improvement: I would want to start off by having some sort of a retreat where people can get totally away from this madness and really spend some quiet time in a different atmosphere. I think too much of our work we've tried to fit into the work day and I think that what we do is just so fast and so furious that we really need to get away, I think that would have been a better start." [Meeting with Andy, 7/14/93]

A period of review and reflection early in this Project would have been valuable; as well as focusing on process issues and possible obstacles, it could also have been used to focus on the likely outcomes for all concerned.

Ownership and Identity

Ownership and control are complementary issues; control is a fundamental issue in any learner-centered work and it remained an issue throughout this Project. Tensions emerged early in the Project when participants appeared reluctant to take a lead in their work and seemed to be dependent on the project staff. Literacy South staff tried to encourage participants to feel that the participants controlled their own projects by providing information about our expectations and establishing an understanding that participants could re-invent research to meet their needs -- these projects were to serve *their* needs rather than to serve academic disciplines.

Participants came into the project with their own concerns, and most of the participants' projects remained very close to their original ideas. They mainly asked for clarification, definition, and for help with the research process. **Participants' original research questions were grounded in their experience; although the design of some projects changed over time, the participants remained clear about and committed to their questions.** For example, Angela explained her question's origin:

> "I used to teach high-school and I knew that students were not motivated to learn and didn't want to be there. And these students want to be there and they want to learn, and I just wanted to see how their attitudes and interest affected, if it did, and how it affected how they learned." [Angela interview with Pearl, 9/7/93]

Many participants struggled with their preconceptions about research; we encouraged them to focus on their questions and learning rather than on other people's definitions of research.

> Since I have never done research per se, I looked at it I guess in more of a technical concept than I do now. And by that I mean when you think of research you think of a lot of collected data and scores and scores of written things and written reports. It's helped me I think to have a better understanding and be more comfortable with the fact that - the fact now that I know that research doesn't have to be a great elaborate string of information of written page after page of you know written documentation and so forth. And my particular project, I'd never you know thought of it so much as research as I do now. And when I first presented my idea, I was very apprehensive also about whether or not it would be - it would fit into the term research, you know. So - yes, I feel, I feel more comfortable now with it and also had very little knowledge of research I guess, as a researcher beforehand." [Pete interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

The issue of ownership, therefore, became transformed as participants began to see themselves as practitioner researchers.

> "When Linda first asked about you know, would I participate, I was very skeptical because I just wasn't sure what - naturally, to me, it's the first time to do something of this nature. And so I was quite apprehensive about it and then as I begin to become involved more and have talked with Andy on several occasions, it's been a lot, it's been a lot clearer to me and it's helped me to realize that it's my project. In other words, it's something that I have to determine how I can do and how - set my own pace so to speak, rather than to have to meet some other guidelines that were imposed outside. Certainly there are dates and so forth that we have to keep in mind, but at the same time, it's good to be able to work on a more individual basis. And I feel pretty good about it right now. I think it's going to be helpful to me as a teacher. I think it has already been somewhat helpful to me with my students."[Pete interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

Angela's re-definitions of research and researcher go hand in hand:

> "At first it was real hard because we didn't know what was expected, we didn't know how lengthy it was supposed to be, we didn't know who it was for, what it was going to be, who was going to see it afterwards, we didn't know any of that. But now, I enjoy doing this type of thing, now that we know more, have a more well defined role in what we're supposed to be doing.
>
> Pearl: How would you now define researchers?
>
> Angela: Well it would have to be a real broad definition, because everybody conducts it in a different manner. Researcher could be looking at observations, observational techniques through student work, interviews, how you interact with students, how teachers interact with students. It could be doing some research background in the library, in other words, a diversified method of looking at many different methods of taking material and not just going to the

> library and looking it up and writing a report on it. Being involved in participating, I think hands on working with students and other instructors and videos, and things like that, I think could be a broad definition of research. And it encompasses a lot more things that I probably haven't even thought of." [Angela interview with Pearl, 7/23/93]

Literacy South staff started with a fairly traditional research model involving a sequence of steps (outlined in Chapter 1). Practitioners organized their work in ways that were rooted in their perceptions of themselves and their evolving research personae, however. Their frame of reference was organized by their work as practitioners, and their research had to fit into that frame. **Rather than becoming academic researchers, as practitioner researchers they made the research part of their work**, making it fit in with their other activities, and making sense of it in the same terms they use for the rest of their work. This is consistent with Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann's (1993) study of practitioner research projects; they found:

> Practitioners select research methods that are congruent with, and that often intensify or extend, their day-to-day activities as teachers, tutors, and administrators. (p. 34)

Providing funds for the participating organizations enabled practitioners' involvement in the project, but it did not reallocate their time or priorities. Participants' first priority remained their students and, in the case of PPP, their organizing activities.

> "I'd worked at BI as an aide in Ann's class, and they were already there. So I didn't have the problems of trying to run people down and set up x amount of meetings, I only interviewed four students. And if I were doing this again, and had more time, I would probably have taken a sample of at least 10." [Angela interview with Pearl, 9/7/93]

> My primary obligation is to the grant that I'm working on, you know, and the Literacy South research comes second to that. I don't feel like that I can do that to take away from what's going on. And we have hit, for the past three weeks, it's just been a very busy, busy time as far as the grant is concerned and what is going on in the classrooms. And I have literally not had the opportunity to pull the students out of what they're doing to sit them down to do the interviews.... And you know, and I'm not making excuses, I mean it's just one of those things that happen, and eventually I will get to the point where yes, I can pull them out and do the interviews, but it hasn't been possible yet. I cannot pull a student out of class to do that if it's going to interrupt what they're doing or interrupt the whole class." [Ann interview with Pearl, 4/16/93]

> You know there's so many people that have so much to say about us, or me, that I'm often resistant to just the word research. But it's also very rare that my

> demographic slot [African-American female] does the researcher... so that piece feels fairly uplifting and some way empowering, so that you know, I like the fact that the work is our research, that our work is the research. That we've tailored this project, or we're doing this project so that what we do is the substance of our research and we're the ones who are saying something about it. [Roni]

Many participants could integrate data collection with their teaching; analysis and writing, however, required time that was separate from teaching and, therefore, there was a heightened sense of competing demands and pressures during this last period of the Project.

Organizational Culture and Practitioner Research

All of the participants in this Project were given the choice about conducting individual or group projects. **The choice of individual or group work reflected the culture of the larger organizational setting.** In this Project, the group work at PPP was conducted in a small organization where group decision making was the norm. The individual projects at ACC were conducted in a larger organization in which decision making responsibility is more differentiated and teachers work with a great deal of autonomy. Two people at ACC, Michelle and Ray, worked as a team, partly as a practical response to the competing time demands of their professional lives.

When individuals conduct their projects separately, they have greater flexibility for planning, scheduling, and executing their work. They can make decisions quickly and independently, often, and their projects only have to reflect their own experience. Group work, as we know, is more complicated. **Group projects require clarity about each person's relationship to the group as well as to the project.** Questions and processes have to be negotiated by the whole group. Therefore, time and scheduling for meetings become enhanced as issues in the research process, and differences in experience and perspective among the group members become resources as well as potential obstacles in the process.

Confidentiality

At ACC, each person was conducting a separate piece of work. Some of these were potentially sensitive since they provided a critique of different areas of the Department's work, and of the work of some individuals. There

was, however, considerable overlapping of staff in focus groups, as subjects of interviews, and in video taped classroom sessions. Additionally, many of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a secretary, who was herself an instructor in one of the classes being videotaped. These overlaps mean that confidentiality could not be easily maintained. This did not seem to be an issue for most staff, though some sensitivities did show themselves later in the work.

This is an issue that should be added to the issues to be shared at the beginning of a project. It is, however, not just a simple issue of how to protect the anonymity of informants. Conducting practitioner research in a group setting implies that the participants will work to some degree on issues of common concern. This suggests that they should share their concerns and that they might try to develop some consensus about their shared issues early in the project. A tension seems likely to emerge between consensus and confidentiality that should be discussed (probably at intervals) by the group.

Conclusion

Practitioner research is only one facet of a larger arena of inquiry-based staff development, defined by Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1993) as:

> The range of approaches to adult learning that purposefully builds on the richness and diversity of real-world experience and the knowledge that teachers, tutors, and administrators bring to the field. In these approaches, practitioners pose the questions and conduct field-based inquiry into daily practice.... This stance on staff/professional development explicitly positions practitioners as learners, researchers, and reformers. (p. 1)

Inquiry-based staff development has the potential to respond to many of the problems inherent in adult literacy's present approaches to staff development. Comparison of the literature on staff development in adult basic education and in public schools reveals a number of important differences that provide guidance for those of us working in staff development in adult literacy (this is drawn from Fingeret and Cockley, 1992 and from Lytle, Belzer and Reumann, 1992):

1. The need for a critical perspective. The literature in staff development in adult basic education reflects a lack of critical analysis of the assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that are embedded in current staff development practice. Although some nontraditional activities may be embraced, such as action research, the larger political, social, and

philosophical questions are not raised. Thus, the language of action research and inquiry-based staff development becomes defined within the traditional models rather than defining an alternative paradigm.

2. The need to problematize the knowledge base in adult literacy. The traditional remedial approach to staff development tends to conceptualize the "knowledge base" as known and content-based; the expert is responsible for communicating it to teachers. In an inquiry-based model the knowledge base is problematic rather than known, seeing teachers as generators of knowledge rather than simply as receivers or users.

3. The need for staff development to be practiced as an ongoing process, generated by teachers and making use of resources in the environment. Teachers involved in staff development may be understood as interacting with the resources in their environment to structure their learning. Staff development has to do with teachers' attitudes to their own growth and development, rather than with the scheduling of workshops, so it is viewed as a continuing process.

4. The need for community. ABE staff development persists in treating teachers as isolated individuals, even though there is strong evidence that it is extremely effective when staff development efforts develop a sense of community -- of being a member of a group with shared values and shared struggles and to which one can contribute as well as learn. Adult literacy education programs are experimenting with a few community-building mechanisms, including study circles in which teachers come together on a regular basis to explore ideas that are of mutual interest (Pelavin Associates, 1991).

5. The need for a focus on program improvement. Many authors who discuss public school staff development have moved from focusing on individual teacher improvement to a focus on larger structures -- schools or districts. The adult literacy program as an overall environment in which learning and teaching take place is much more invisible in the adult literacy staff development literature, even though the program's culture affects teachers' orientation to their own ongoing learning. In addition, staff development in ABE continues to be oriented almost exclusively to teachers, although there is evidence that administrators often have little or no preparation for their roles (Foster, 1990).

This Project has addressed many of the points listed above. It was generated by our critical analysis of traditional staff development in adult literacy education. We believe that there must be philosophical consistency in the field's approaches to instruction, preparation and support of instruction, and assessment and evaluation. This means that staff development must be based on assumptions and beliefs that are congruent with those underlying practice; teachers' knowledge must be respected in staff development and students' knowledge must be respected in instruction. This is not a matter of technique; Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1993) explain:

> When practitioners themselves conduct research, they make problematic what they think they already know, what they see when they observe their adult students or staff members as learners, and what they choose to do about the disjunctions that often exist in their classrooms, programs, and communities. The point here is that practitioner research is not a staff development technique or activity but rather a radically different way of positioning oneself as a generator, not merely a consumer, of significant knowledge for improving practice. (p. 45)

This Project demonstrates one way in which a practitioner research project can be conducted. It also illustrates the power of practitioner research as a staff development approach that places teachers and administrators in the center of their own learning and supports them as agents of growth and development for themselves and for the field.

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SECTION IV: APPENDICES

This Section contains four appendices:

1. Practitioner Research Outcomes: ACC
2. Practitioner Research Outcomes: PPP
3. Project Reading List
4. Project meetings that were tape recorded

Appendix 1

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH OUTCOMES AT ACC

The project participants at Alamance Community College each produced a written report of their project, and a one-page summary of that report.

This Appendix contains the collected summaries. Copies of the full reports may be obtained from:

Director of Literacy Programs
Alamance Community College
PO Box 8000
Graham, NC 27253-8000

Telephone: (910) 229-9711

Introduction

With varying degrees of apprehension, nine ACC Literacy Programs staff members agreed to participate in practitioner research in association with Literacy South. The project's purpose was to afford opportunities to:

1) Pursue questions about some aspect of our work,

2) Add to our knowledge base, and

3) Develop our professional ability.

We were able to determine our own topics, approaches, what data to collect and analyze, and what form the final product would take. Literacy South provided support and assistance throughout the project in dialogue groups, workshops, and individual consultations and interviews.

The following summary reports outline our questions, purposes, methods, findings and their implications for our staff and programs. We believe that our research has far-reaching and practical applications for our work; thus , we are pleased to share with you not only theory and ideals but specific use for our research. The completed reports will be available, if you wish to explore certain issues further, by the end of October 1993.

Practitioner Research as a Staff Development Activity at Alamance Community College

Director of ACC Literacy Programs

I. Research Question: The main question for me was whether or not self-selected research activities would develop staff in ways which would be helpful to them in their work with students. This was an issue because of our need for more staff development and stimulation to try other ways.

II. How: In addition to attending all full meetings and the last half of the dialogue groups, I was interviewed by and engaged in philosophical and general discussion with Andrew Pates of Literacy South. Some of these conversations were directed, some were spontaneous, and all were recorded and transcribed. I then analyzed them to produce my final report.

This report covered 1) the history of our participation, 2) a list of projects selected, 3) why we did it, 4) my activities, 5) staff initial reactions, 6) outcomes, and 7) conclusions and future of practitioner research here at ACC.

III. Findings: Staff were initially reluctant, apprehensive, unsure, suspicious and fearful. This was replaced by more positive responses as the work progressed. Finally, there was joy in their discoveries and their pleasure at finishing, for they felt the importance and usefulness of their work.

IV. Implications: We will continue this activity at ACC. We will approach the ACC Foundation for yearly funding of such practitioner research.

Status of Developmentally Disabled High School Age Students:
A Look At Local Transition For Students

"John"
Former Coordinator of Supported Transition Program

I. My purpose in doing this project was to find out from students where they stood in terms of preparation for life after school. It was my initial concern that they were not prepared for adulthood and that the data I would collect would show this.

II. My interest in this project centered around my work with the Supported Transition Program, a three year grant that I worked on through ACC. I noticed that many students lacked basic knowledge about choices available to them, and this concerned me. Further, I saw that many of these students' outcomes were predictable. I wanted an even clearer picture of these students' needs by interviewing them.

III. Through taped interviews of these students, I was able to gather more information. Ten students, former participants in the project, agreed to be interviewed. I was careful to have a mix of different types of students (classification, race, gender) to get a good representative cross section. The interviews were held individually and centered around four areas of interest: socialization, residential, educational, and vocational. All students were asked each question with as little prompting as possible. The interviews were "fun" for the participants and provided interesting points I had missed in my original brainstorming.

IV. The result of my findings is that these students are ill-equipped through present education to meet the demands placed on them after school. Further, they are also not doing any planning to effect their immediate futures. It is clear to me that more teaching needs to focus on decision making and goal planning for these students. As these students are taught in the future to advocate for their needs and to speak out on issues affecting them, educational services will respond and outcomes for these students will improve.

Whose Woods These Are I Think I Know

"Marion"
ABE Instructor

I. Having been involved with basic skills education some degree since 1976, I wanted to find out how other instructors at this college feel about their experiences in our basic skills programs. I wondered if we shared the same perceptions, concerns, and observations; whatever the issues that might be discussed, their discovery would be valuable to our programs. I viewed this project as a self-study to find out what works, what benefits us, what is lacking, and what is detrimental. The title of my project reflects an initial concern of mine: do we know or just think we know whose woods these are? How vested are we in our positions?

II. I needed to talk directly with instructors in small groups to find out their thoughts and feelings. I developed a list of our 30 instructors, noting professional and educational backgrounds and other information to see a general profile of a basic skills instructor at ACC. Rather than select instructors to interview, I sent invitations to all with a choice of meeting dates. A total of eight instructors met with me in three small groups in June. The groups had a total of thirty-two years of experience with ACC; four had more than five years with us.

III. I found out that basic skills instructors at ACC feel proud of and personally rewarded by their work; at the same time, they feel unvalued and disrespected as the "poor brother of ACC" not only by other divisions in the college but by members of our own programs. They feel a lack of teamwork or camaraderie and some instructors perceived themselves as independent contractors at the mercy of the whimsical, arbitrary nature of basic skills programs. Monetary matters, while mentioned as a concern, were not as frustrating as the more often mentioned needs of meeting to exchange ideas and be updated with the programs, having more input in curriculum planning, and receiving appreciation, motivation, and respect from others.

IV. Promises To Keep: From the transcripts of interviews with instructors, we can identify issues that require attention and improvement. Some ways that we can and intend to enrich out basic skills programs are: increasing teamwork and cross-training, meeting at regular intervals for updates and exchanging ideas, promoting a professional and mission-oriented manner, and providing instructors with more opportunities for selection of curriculum materials.

How Students' Attitudes and Interests Affect Learning Rates

"Angela"
ABE/GED Instructor

I. I wanted to see if and how student attitudes and interests affected learning rates because I wanted to see how interests and attitudes affected motivation to learn.

II. To find out the answer to my question, I gathered various data including the LAS, SORT, TABE and CASAS Entrance Exams, students interviews which included school backgrounds, attitudes and interests regarding learning, a learning styles inventory and individual, computer, and group observations.

III. I found several correlations and differences among my subjects including that Students 1 - 4's learning styles revealed they liked to learn best through listening, visualizing, and manipulating as evidenced through their successes on the computer. Student 1's favorite subjects were spelling and reading, while Student 2 preferred spelling and math. Students 3 and 4 both liked math best and were highly motivated in their favorite subjects. Students 1 and 2 were dropouts, and 3 and 4 were high school graduates. Through observations, Students 1 and 2 wanted to learn as quickly and as carefully as possible, and didn't seem to mind not making all one-hundreds, while accepting constructive criticism, working independently. Students 3 and 4 worked together well and always strived for one-hundreds and didn't accept constructive criticism very well.

IV. I have enjoyed working on this project because it has given me the chance to do some soul searching within myself and has gotten me to think about what interests and attitudes motivate me to learn. Perhaps the difference between me and my test subjects is that I have been through the educational system from preschool to graduate school and have had numerous success stories. My subjects had more failures and although we all were motivated, we are motivated in very different ways. Working with GED students at times is challenging, trying to figure out how best to help them. But since they are so determined, it is a real joy to be able to make a difference and this research will help me to be more cognizant of students' needs and interests.

V. I hope to use this research to administer interest inventories to my classes and will plan to gear lessons to match student interests.

What Is Participatory/Learner Centered Instruction?

"Ray", ABE Coordinator
and "Michelle", ABE Instructor

I. The definition of a participatory/learner centered (plc) approach to instruction was varied with no clear definition among staff or students. Meanings included:

- simply helping an individual student with their work;
- materials for study being created together by the student and teacher; and
- students having control of the decision making process related to learning.

II. The process was carried out through videotapes of two classrooms and two instructors. Also, three focus groups were created to give feedback on what was and was not participatory. The two instructors and classes were very different. However, each felt that their classes were participatory in nature. The focus groups were as varied as the classes; however, one focus group was more in line with the researchers' definition of participatory than the other two. This focus group had much more teaching and life experience with adults which may have influenced their views.

III. The findings were interesting in that they reflected the researchers' suspicions that
- the definition of plc instruction is more or less in the infancy stages; and
- plc instruction is even less defined and visible in actual practice and application in the classroom as understood and viewed by the researchers.

Most all instructors and students felt that their classes were participatory/learner centered. Even those in the focus groups who had not clearly stipulated a definition or a practice felt that they used a plc approach to instruction. It could be questioned whether this was due to feelings that:
- this approach should or must be used;
- it was indeed a better approach; or
- it was in vogue to use the terminology even though one did not understand the definition, philosophy, or practice of a plc approach.

IV. Implications from research show need for more discussion of plc approach to hammer out a clearer definition. There is also the need to create new terminology so that we share a common language which all are speaking and understanding. These two researchers are more convinced than ever than this approach is a valid if not superior approach to instruction. It is our personal opinion that training for instructors should include the plc approach to instruction. This could be achieved by doing part of our training in clusters of 3-5 instructors working as a team doing research and sharing concerns and findings. In addition, they could then lead training sessions with the larger staff to share findings.

Finally, we feel the need to approach not only instruction but administration in our program in a more participatory manner. This would enable us to move toward team building, cross training, and a staff centered approach to decision making at all levels. By that, we would be practicing a much more staff-centered approach that could increase morale and growth in all staff at all levels. We recommend that this approach be seriously considered and implemented during the 94/95 school year, if not sooner.

How Do Workplace Literacy Classes Affect the Lives of the Participants?

"Ann"

I. Background and Purpose of Research
A. Why Workplace Literacy Classes?
B. Purpose of Study
II. Data Gathering
A. Supervisor Surveys
B. Student Surveys
C. Interviews
III. Outcomes
A. How Workplace Literacy Classes Affect Participants on their Jobs.
B. How Workplace Literacy Classes Affect Participants in their Lives.
IV. Evaluation
A. What Does the Data Mean?
B. Summary Story

As technological advances in the industrial world make the workplace more productive and more efficient, it also creates a crisis - a workforce who is not prepared. As a result of this urgent need, workplace literacy classes are emerging to fit both the need of the employer and the need of the employee. Since June, 1992 I have had the opportunity to work as an instructor with a workplace literacy team at the Pioneer Plant of Burlington Industries. Our objective has been to create and to implement curriculum which will upgrade the skills of the participants. The purpose of my study was to explore the question, "How do workplace literacy classes affect the lives of the participants?"

Supervisor surveys, students surveys, and interviews were used to gather data. From the data, the responses fell into two categories: 1) How the classes affected the participants on the job, and 2) How the classes affected the participants in their personal lives.

After examining all of the data, I felt that two factors were common to all responses: 1) The students had a fear of learning and 2) They felt discouraged before the PACE program. I feel that in all the responses given, the underlying message was that the fear of learning had been removed and they were no longer discouraged. I feel that the following story sums up the over-all influences these classes have had on the lives of the participants:

A man stopped to watch a Little League game. He asked one of the youngsters the score.
"We're behind 18 to nothing," was the answer.
"Well," said the man, "I must say you don't look discouraged."
"Discouraged?" the boy asked. "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't come to bat yet."

The PACE classes have given the participants their chance at bat.

LITERACY SOUTH RESEARCH PROJECT

"Pete"
ABE Instructor

I. My purpose in the project was to find out from ABE students experiences, both positive and negative that most affected their formal education.

II. My question originated from comments made by students (and discussions that sometimes followed) regarding incidents that took place in school - many of which appeared to have left negative impressions. Students in the classes, one from second shift and the other from third shift, were employed at Glen Raven Mills, Glen Touch Division, Altamahaw, NC. As I continued to listen to the students, my curiosity increased to the point of wanting to know more about what "brought on these happenings". If they had been teacher - related, I wanted to avoid making the same mistakes!

III. After several class sessions and explaining to students my interest in learning more about their formal education years. I asked for volunteer participants and had a very generous response. I then selected six students from the two classes to get the best cross section of education level, race, and family background. We then scheduled interviews (most of which had to be changed due to change in work schedules). These were taped (audio) interviews that varied in time and content.

IV. While the actual findings of the research did not reveal a large amount of negative or positive experiences during the students' formal education, the "fruit" of the effort came from the project itself. First, it gave me a much better understanding of the variations in collecting information - "it doesn't always go the way you plan it!" Secondly, the students became much more relaxed as the interviews progressed. They talked much more willingly and openly than I had anticipated - expressing their views about their education, both past and present. Most were very open also, in talking about their personal lives (more in detail after the tape recorder was turned off). As I listened to them relate to me of good times and tragedy, success and failure, in their lives - I was amazed at how well they had adjusted! They also talked about their goals for the future. The relationship (level of understanding) between me and my students had increased tremendously! Thirdly, I am convinced that this depth in teacher/student relationships could not have been reached without our times of class discussion and the interview process. This will definitely affect my attitude and approach to teaching in the future, however, the time element is the big factor - how will I find the time for a similar procedure as part of my routine in the classroom? To me, this a question well worth pondering - perhaps a question for all our instructors to consider. It is my intention to use my findings in the project and recommend to our superiors that (somehow) more time and effort be spent in "getting to know our students".

Workplace Literacy Curriculum: A Participatory Approach

"Bridget"
NWLP Site Coordinator

Introduction: This research looks at how I developed a workplace literacy curriculum at BI (a federally funded workplace project). As Site Coordinator for the workplace project, I began researching these issues because I was struggling to come to my own conclusions about how to develop a curriculum that would satisfy the stated goals of the National Workplace Literacy Project and would also meet the needs of both company and individual learners.

Research Approach: During a three month period, I kept a journal which included dates of each entry, along with comments about what I was doing with the curriculum, comments about interactions with others, and observations about how the curriculum was being used in the classroom. I also reviewed curriculum materials, supervisor surveys, and student records. I first analyzed my own involvement in the process and how my views changed over the course of the project. This was followed by an analysis of interactions of key people or groups of people with the curriculum as it was developing. These included the Project Director, Project Evaluator, Project Coordinator, Instructors, Learners, Company Personnel, and Literacy South.

Findings and Issues: Numerous issues which emerged from this research (issues listed in detail in full report) may be summarized in terms of staff development, appropriate materials, and computer use. Perhaps the most notable finding in this context was that emphasis on a job specific curriculum did not seem to meet the needs of either the learners or the company. A journal note illustrates this point:

> "...when we started [the project], employees said this is wonderful, but it's too good to be true, there must be a catch. So, now that we've started [the curriculum]...they feel this is the catch and they feel like it's too much of [the company's] agenda and not enough of them being able to work on their own needs." (journal note re: conversation with company training staff member)

Conclusions

1) Staff development activities which are based on critical reflection and practical experience can also encourage clarity of purpose with regard to the larger issues of workplace literacy.

2) A broader and more participatory approach to the development of workplace literacy curricula, rather than a job specific approach, would better meet the literacy needs in the workplace. Greater emphasis on learner-centered instruction in this context would encourage more participation. This would also allow project staff to explore other (and sometimes greater) needs of the project. Some of those needs might include computer use and developing the staff members' own comfort, ability, and creativity with a learner-centered approach to the curriculum.

3) In order to make better use of computer capabilities and strengthen the various abilities of learners, computers should be used for a much wider set of skills and functions.

4) Regardless of who develops the curriculum, opportunities must be created for all project staff to consult on the philosophical basis of the curriculum. These opportunities should be ongoing and should include discussion of ways to make practical classroom applications consistent with the philosophical basis of the curriculum.

Appendix 2

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH OUTCOMES AT PPP

Nontraditional Literacy: An Innovative Approach to Organizing

Summary

Piedmont Peace Project does literacy work because it is an integral and natural part of our work. Whether it is to create materials, to define our voices, to provide a safe place for learning and skills development, to increase membership, to raise awareness and empower members, or to make connections between personal and political issues, it is a need that is unavoidable in our organizing work. Because our literacy program is nontraditional in methodology and structure, our approach to the problems we face is also different.

The key to this approach to literacy and organizing is to accept people's experiences, views and beliefs, while maintaining our mission to be inclusive and to empower our constituents.

We have analyzed in depth the process by which we do our work. This report contains three pieces:

1. Why PPP does literacy work.
2. Some problems that occur and issues that arise in doing literacy work at PPP.
3. An analysis of one issue and what learning we can derive from it (Issue: Homophobia in the context of Randall Kenan's "Foundations of the Earth," from Let the Dead Bury Their Dead).

This has enabled us to critique our work and identify our own strengths and weaknesses. We have concluded that this is a constantly evolving experience. Our success depends on our ability to be innovative.

Appendix 3

PROJECT READING LIST

Literacy South/National Institute for Literacy Project

Innovative Training Practices: Practitioner Research as Staff Development

Some Selected Reading

Introduction

This reading list describes a few publications that may contribute to your work. It is organized in two sections:

- Items about adult literacy which provide context for this work or which might relate to some of your research pieces.
- Items about practitioner research, some of which are not drawn from the adult literacy field but which are still interesting.

It is not suggested that you read the whole list but that you use it as a menu from which to select pieces that might be relevant to what you are doing or thinking about, and as a starting point to pursue issues you want to read about more extensively.

It might be useful at future meetings also to add items which you have read which you think might be of interest to colleagues working on the project.

Key items are marked with an asterisk (*) and a copy is attached. Copies of all the other pieces are available on request: please contact Pearl, Jonathan or Andy at Literacy South.

Adult Literacy

* Fingeret, Hanna Arlene, *Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions. An Update.* Columbus Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Information Series No 355, 1992. (57 pages)

This monograph, just published, provides an up to the minute review of the state of adult literacy provision in the United States. It is a good starting point for reading on a range

of key issues in adult literacy and locates participatory literacy education in a broader context. It is also provides a starting point for understanding the role of practitioner research in adult literacy both as a contribution to research (pages 20-21) and as an approach to staff development (pages 21-25). It includes an extensive and up-to-date bibliography.

Fingeret, Hanna Arlene, "Through the Looking Glass: Literacy as Perceived by Illiterate Adults". Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting, March 1982. (12 pages)

Based on Hanna's doctoral research, this piece shows the different ways in which literacy and illiteracy are seen by adults with low literacy skills, how they handle the consequences of their illiteracy and the implications for literacy teaching, in particular the focus on individual or group based teaching. This piece is also an excellent example of how qualitative research can be written up.

Fingeret, Hanna Arlene, "Common Sense and Book Learning: Culture Clash?". *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, April 1983. (3 pages)

Explores the different cultural assumptions underlying the oral culture in which many non-literate adults live and the "literature culture" underlying many of the assumptions and approaches of adult literacy education. A key piece in understanding the basic principles underlying participatory literacy practices.

Quigley, Allan, "Looking Back in Anger: the Influences of Schooling on Illiterate Adults". *Journal of Education*, Fall 1992. (Draft copy available: 29 pages)

An account of a piece of research with adults who did <u>not</u> participate in adult literacy programs. It provides an interesting account of their experience of their schooling and the implications for adult literacy programs that they might find acceptable. It includes some interesting data about the relationship of age to views of literacy provision.

Fingeret, Hanna Arlene, "Research Within Reach: Literacy and Helping Networks". *Focus on Basics*, undated. (2 pages)

In this piece, Hanna explains how she has taken some of the findings from here own research about the social networks within which adults live, and applied it to staff development in adult literacy.

Practitioner Research

* Lytle, Susan and Peggy McGuire, "Staff Development at the Crossroads". *NCAL Connections*, National Center on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania, April 1993. (2 pages)

A brief discussion of the issues involved in adult literacy staff development and how practitioner research addresses these issues, with particular emphasis on the Adult literacy Practitioner Inquiry project at NCAL, probably the largest practitioner research project currently in progress in adult literacy. This project is of particular interest because it starts by creating "inquiry communities" which in turn generate a range of research according to the issues these communities identify.

* Lytle, Susan, Aliza Belzer and Rebecca Reumann, *Developing the Professional Workforce for Adult Literacy Education*. Philadelphia: NCAL, Policy Brief, December 1992. (11 pages)

A fuller discussion of the above project which relates the practitioner research approach (they call it teacher inquiry) to participatory literacy education. It also locates it in a schema of models of staff development, relating it to a model of staff development that focuses on program improvement rather than individual teacher improvement; in which the teachers are therefore active constructors of their own professional practice, rather than just recipients of received wisdom.

* Lytle, Susan, Aliza Belzer and Rebecca Reumann, *Invitations to Inquiry: Rethinking Staff Development in Adult Literacy Education*. Philadelphia: NCAL, Technical Report TR92-2, 1992. (39 pages)

A much fuller account of the work described in the previous two references. The core of the document reports research findings to date on practitioner prior knowledge and experience, opportunities and barriers to learning on the job, practitioners' questions and interests.

Lytle, Susan and Robert Fecho, "Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation". *English Education*, February 1991, pp 5 - 25.

An account of one piece of teacher inquiry which involved "cross-visitation", writing teachers being paired to spend time working with each other, and with each other's classes. Touches upon some interesting issues concerning collaboration and mutual support between teachers and is also a good example of a piece of qualitative research about practitioner research.

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn, and Susan Lytle, *Inside Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1993. (310 pages)

An important review of teacher research, though not applied to adult literacy. It contains a long discussion of teacher research and a number of pieces by teachers describing their research using a range of different methods. A key piece of reading if you want to pursue the idea of teacher research further.

Appendix 4

PROJECT MEETINGS THAT WERE TAPE RECORDED

Date:	Item:	Transcribed
12/1/92	Mtg Lit S staff project briefing	No
12/14/92	PPP final UPS trng day & 1st NIL mtg A/P/Roni/Liz/Jolene/Page/Jonathan	No
1/15/93	Mtg ACC A/P/Jere/Linda/Marion/Bridget/ 3 instructors to introduce project	No
1/25/93	Mtg ACC A/P plus 7 ACC staff about planned projects	No
1/28/93	Update mtg Hanna/Andy	No
2/2/93	Progress mtg Hanna/Andy; workshop planning	No
2/2/93	Mtg Lit S staff	No
2/9/93	Mtg PPP A/P Roni/Cheryl/Billy/Liz re their work, how to analyze it	Yes
2/17/93	Workshop, ACC	Yes
2/22/93	Update mtg A/Hanna/Pearl re next steps inc eval ints	No
3/16/93	Update mtg A/Hanna/Pearl	No
3/17/93	Mtg A/Roni/Liz/Billy, S.Pines	No
3/17/93	Pearl int Roni	Yes
3/17/93	Pearl int Liz	Yes
3/17/93	Pearl int Billy	Yes
4/1/93	Mtg A/Linda re progress; mini grants Then Jereann	Yes
4/6/93	Update mtg A/P/H. How I see the project at this stage	No
4/16/93	Pearl int Ann	Yes
4/16/93	Pearl int Michelle	Yes

4/16/93	Pearl int Bridget	Yes
4/16/93	Pearl int Pete	Yes
4/16/93	Pearl int Marion	Yes
4/16/93	Mtg ACC dialogue gp. Six staff A/P	Yes
4/20/93	Update mtg A/Hanna/Pearl review of the ACC dialogue gp and meaning of this style of research	No
4/20/93	Mtg A/Linda	No
4/29/93	Mtg Lit S Study gp re evaluation rep	Yes
5/4/93	Update mtg A/Hanna/Pearl Re report/eval & eval ints	No
5/4/93	Mtg A/Linda about factors influencing research at ACC	Yes
5/14/93	ACC Dialogue Group	Yes
5/14/93	Pearl int John	Yes
6/10/93	Workshop planning meeting; Bridget/ Marion/Hanna/Pearl/Andy	No
6/15/93	Update mtg A/P/H	No
6/15/93	Mtg A/Linda	Yes
6/24/93	PPP workshop planning A/P/Liz/Roni/ Cheryl/Billy/Alice	No
7/1/93	ACC Workshop	No
7/6/93	Update mtg A/P/H	No
7/6/93	Lit S staff mtg	No
7/14/93	Mtg A/Linda	Yes
7/23/93	ACC dialogue group	Yes
7/23/93	A int Ray	Yes
7/23/93	Pearl int Ray	Yes
7/23/93	Pearl int Angela	Yes
7/27/93	A int Michelle	Yes

8/9/93	A meeting Bridget	No
8/10/93	PPP workshop data analysis	Yes
8/24/93	ACC workshop data analysis	No
9/7/93	Pearl int Ann	Yes
9/7/93	Pearl int Marion	Yes
9/7/93	Pearl int Angela,	Yes
9/7/93	Pearl int Pete	Yes
9/7/93	Pearl int Bridget,	Yes
9/7/93	Pearl int Ray	Yes
9/7/93	Hanna int Linda	Yes
9/14/93	ACC dialogue group	Yes
9/21/93	ACC dialogue group	Yes
9/29/93	PPP workshop data analysis S.Pines	No
10/1/93	ACC final workshop	Yes
10/5/93	A int Jim Holland	Yes
10/8/93	Update mtg A/P/H	Yes
10/19/93	Andy Phone Int Karen Allen	No
10/22/93	PPP data analysis workshop	No
10/22/93	Pearl int Billy	Yes
10/22/93	Pearl int Cheryl	Yes
10/22/93	Pearl int Liz	Yes

Appendix 5

STARTING AGAIN

What would we do differently if we were starting this Project again? What would we recommend that you do if you were starting a practitioner research project anew? We have wrestled with this question just as we wrestled at the beginning of the Project itself. And perhaps therein lies the answer: you do have to wrestle with it anew each time. There isn't a formula or a standard approach or a standard procedure for conducting practitioner research if it is to genuinely belong to the practitioner. There are, however, some themes that have emerged from the Project which we would like to share.

Starting Point

The one point of which we can be fairly certain is that you must start by spending time with the practitioners, exploring their practice, helping them to identify the issues which they think about, are concerned about, want to know more about. Then you have your starting point.

Our recommendation about a starting point is:

1. Spend time reflecting with practitioners about their key issues, as the basis for research questions, encouraging them to reflect on their knowledge and experience of their work.

This process takes time. The group that will be working together also needs time to get used to working together. So we recommend strongly that the process should start with a period of reflection at the beginning, including the sort of time available through a retreat.

The "Grammar of Research"

The practitioners will probably experience uncertainty about what they should do and will want to know more about what is involved in the mechanics of doing practitioner research. However, this piece should follow, not precede, the exploration of the practitioners' experience and formulation

of issues. This is directly comparable to working on your writing: you need to know what you want to say, why, and who you are saying it to, before you worry about the grammar, spelling and penmanship of your text.

Resources to help provide this framework can come from previous experience of practitioner research and include: **contact with people** from similar settings who have been engaged in practitioner research before; **access to outcomes** of previous pieces of practitioner research, including participant reports and pieces such as this; **checklists** of issues they might experience and have to deal with.

Our second recommendation is:

2. After deciding a focus for the work, provide reference tools to help the participants deal with the issues involved in doing research by sharing experience of what the process of research is like in practice.

A Checklist

Practitioners in this Project, became researchers by incorporating research into their frame of reference: what they did and how they worked were more important in organizing their research than an abstract research model. A checklist of issues they will likely encounter in doing their research and which they will have to address, can provide a flexible framework from which participants can select the issues that concern them.

The checklist might include:

- A decision to work on an individual or group concern.
- A decision to conduct the work as an individual or as part of a group.
- The outcomes that are to be achieved.
- The formats available for presenting findings.
- The time available and likely constraints on time.
- Opportunities to meet with other practitioners in the project.
- Methods of communication among all the people involved.
- Areas of tension that might arise in their context.

- Technology issues (that could be considered at the beginning).
- Confidentiality, and how it would become an issue in that setting.
- Roles, especially for facilitation, communication and support.
- The costs that would be incurred and the budget available to cover them.
- And only finally, the "grammar of research", the research methods that can be used; the processes involved in data collection; data analysis.

The issues that might arise should be explored in concrete terms, helping to reduce uncertainty early in the project for those who are more task oriented.

Taking Ownership

One of the weak areas in this Project was the lack of a clear contract between each participant and the project staff, before participants began their projects. The participants agreed to targets for their work from meeting to meeting, but they were not asked in the early months, to make any individual projection or commitment about what they would try to do by when. This probably increased the uncertainty for everybody. At the same time, it left no framework within which the project staff could be more proactive in interacting with the individual participants without feeling they were interfering unduly.

We would, therefore, suggest that practitioners be asked to formulate contracts about their expected activity and involvement: what they plan to do, their time frame, the inputs and resources they expect to need, and a plan of communication with the support staff. Some needs will not be known by the participants until they experience them and a preplanned pattern of communication with the support staff can provide a framework within which they can share their experience as it unfolds, focus on individual issues and create strategies for dealing with issues at each stage of the work.

Our third recommendation is:

3. Ask participants to formulate contracts about what they want to know, what they plan to do, their time frame for doing it, and the pattern of support and involvement they plan with other people.

The contract could include:

- the general topic they want to study;
- their proposed sequence of activities;
- their timeline, deadlines, and pressure points in their time;
- the outcomes that they envision;
- the audience they might expect to address;
- the resources that they would need, financial, technical and personal.

Monitoring Ongoing Progress

If practitioners engaged in research are to genuinely take ownership of their work, they need a way of organizing it that is individualized to fit the way each person works. We would ask the practitioners to keep portfolios as a method for documenting their progress on fulfilling their contracts. Portfolios offer an approach that fits well with participatory methods and that can facilitate practitioner ownership, at the same time as providing a framework for managing and organizing a range of different activities.

The practicalities of using portfolios in adult literacy have been documented elsewhere (Fingeret, 1993). They would be used here as the basis for project documentation, as the basis for on-going meetings with project support staff, and as a means for participants to monitor their own progress.

Our fourth recommendation is:

4. Ask participants to keep portfolios as a format within which to document their work and to monitor the working of their contract.

Continuing Reflection

One powerful lesson of this Project was the value of the mutual support and learning provided by the participants coming together to share their work. This is separate from the ongoing technical support which is also needed, and which can also support reflection.

Our fifth recommendation is:

5. Ensure that regular group meetings are held, at which the participants can share their work with each other and reflect on its significance.

Finally

It is essential to keep returning to the fact that any learner-centered work must be reinvented with each new group of learners. These points may help start the process but the participants and project staff must be aware that they can change the format and develop new ways of doing things, according to the needs and experience of their group. If they are willing to engage in the struggle, they will have a lively experience which will provide thought-provoking outcomes.

Our last recommendation is:

6. Do it!

References Cited:
Fingeret, Hanna. *It Belongs To Me: a guide to portfolio assessment in adult education programs*. Durham, NC: Literacy South, 1993.